

A Pattern I Observe In The Connection (Or Lack Thereof) Between Humanism And Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of May 30, 2019 at 9:33 PM

Yes, that's the problem with reading PD5 out of context. If one had first started with the twelve fundamental principles of physics, one would know that eternal absolute rules are physically impossible due to the nature of the universe (no center, no creating god, constant motion, all things that come together eventually break apart).

If one had read more of the ethics, one would have read the argument (now mainly left to us in Torquatus / Cicero) that all virtue is subservient to the goal of pleasure, and thus has no absolute meaning outside of the context of the goal of pleasure.

And if one had read more of the epistemology, one would know that Epicurus held the senses, feelings, anticipations (all human "relative" and not "absolute" faculties) to be the source of and test of all knowledge, and would therefore know that morality requires context, and that rationalist morality is false and a dead end.

But it is absolutely right to ask about PD5 - read it out of context and it is easy to conclude that Epicurus was talking in terms of OUR modern philosophical system (essentially a Stoic /Platonic / Aristotelian mashup), instead of talking in terms of his own system. And if you do presume he's talking in our context, you draw exactly the opposite conclusion rather than the conclusion that is inherent in Epicurus' own system.

In the same way, it is easy to read one passage in the letter to Menoecus and conclude that "absence of pain" is the full and complete definition of pleasure - despite everything else Epicurus said about joy and dance and food and sex and almost every other kind of normal pleasure that no one in his right mind would think to call "absence of pain."

"Gee honey, you really gave me a lot of "absence of pain" in bed tonight!!!" Such a person deserves to be slapped, not given a philosophy degree.

The basic issue is that Epicurean philosophy requires an attitude of understanding and applying the concept of "context."