

Episode 289 - TD19 - "Epicureans Are Not Spocks!"

Post by "Cassius" of July 4, 2025 at 3:16 PM

Voula Tsouna, in her "Ethics of Philodemus," says:

Quote

.... Section V deals with the issue of whether anger is a good or a bad thing. It elaborates Philodemus'

distinction between two kinds of anger, which he calls, respectively, ὀργή (translit. orgē) and θυμός (translit. thymos), as well as his contention that the Epicurean sage experiences the former kind of anger (orgē) but not the latter.

...

Quote

Epicurus makes the puzzling remark that the wise man is more susceptible than other men to some passions without this impeding his wisdom (D.L. X. 117), and he asserts that the gods feel neither anger nor gratitude (KD 1)—which might imply that lesser beings feel both. According to Philodemus, Epicurus also claims that the wise man will experience thymos; similar statements are found in the writings of Metrodorus and Hermarchus as well (De ir. XLV. 5–15). In general, 'the Great Men' appear to have held that some sort of anger is unavoidable, and that some sages are more prone to it than others. However, they evidently did not clarify just what kind of anger is ineradicable or whether the wise man is susceptible to every form of anger. Later Epicureans debate these issues, each group giving a different interpretation of the canonical texts and citing scripture to defend it. The position that Philodemus advocates in On Anger (probably also held by Zeno of Sidon and his school) is one such view: the sage never experiences an unnatural kind of anger, but is liable to feeling a natural kind of anger compatible with moral perfection. Thus, Philodemus can be perceived as striking a wise compromise between the Peripatetics and the Stoics, and also as holding a middle ground between competing Epicurean factions.²²

...

Quote

Since there is false reasoning of some sort induced by the word (sc. *orgē*), we do not make any simple pronouncement (sc. as to whether anger is a fine or an evil thing), but we claim that the emotion itself taken in isolation is an evil because it is painful or close to painful, whereas taken in conjunction with one's disposition it can even be called a good, as we think. For it results from our understanding of the nature of things and from our holding no false beliefs in the matter of measuring the offences and of punishing the offenders. As a result, in the same way in which we called empty anger (cf. κ[ενὴν ὀρ]γήν: XXXVIII. 1) an evil because it arises from a thoroughly corrupt disposition and brings on countless troubles, we must call natural anger (cf. φυσική[v]: XXXVIII. 6) not an evil—but, in so far as it is something biting,⁸⁰ [it lasts a very short time].

(XXXVII. 20–XXXVIII. 9)

Quote

[To call anger] a weakness (τὸ ἀσθενές) and then apply it to the wise man, so that we also make him weak, is no great problem to us, as it is to some thinkers. They, writing against the Κύρια Δόξαι, maintained that it was extraordinary that anyone had dared to claim that anger, gratitude and all these sorts of things occur in weakness, since Alexander, the most powerful human being of all, was subject to frequent outbursts of anger and did favours to countless men. However, it is not the weakness opposite to the strong constitution of athletes and kings that the (Epicurean) argument is talking about. It is rather a natural constitution subject to death and pain, of which Alexander and indeed every other human being have their share, and perhaps most of all those who, like him, are called the most powerful in that other sense of the word.

(XLIII. 14–41)⁹⁵

Quote

We shall tell our opponent that the sage will be profoundly alienated from, and indeed hates, the person who inflicts on him such great [injuries] or will obviously cause him [great] damage in the future—for this is a fitting consequence (ἀκ[όλο]υθον: XLII. 3–4)—but he does not suffer great mental disturbance. [Neither is any] external thing [all that important], since the sage is not even susceptible to great mental disturbance in the presence of great physical pain, let alone in the presence of angry feelings. For [to be in a state of dreadful suffering] derives from folly. So if one is a fool, this suffering can be [inevitable]. Indeed, there are infinite misfortunes both involved in his folly and consequent upon it, into which the wise man, having a completely clear vision

of them (θεωρῶν: XLII. 19–20), would never fall.
(XLI. 39–XLII. 20)