

Episode 295 - Plutarch's Absurd Interpretation of Epicurean Absence of Pain

Post by "Don" of August 16, 2025 at 11:24 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

14. 14 Given that we have both a mind and a body, it is ridiculous for Epicurus to place the good entirely in the body, and say that the mind has no good of its own.

Plutarch maintains there's a body and there's a soul (mind), σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς, and they have very different desires and pleasure they experience. Epicurus on the other hand acknowledges they are inextricably linked with one relying on the other.

It's obvious too that Plutarch is vehemently against seeing the gods as irrelevant to one's life in the sense of having blessings come from them or to fear being cursed by the gods. Plutarch sees the gods as being indispensable in living properly. Epicureans obviously threw him into apoplectic rage! He must have saw the school as an extreme danger to society and worked hard to stamp out the Gardens influence. Plutarch goes on a while about the Deity both in Nonne posse and Against Colotes.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

25. 25 Since Epicurus said that fear of punishment is a bad thing, and it helps men refrain from doing evil if they fear punishment from the gods, men would be better off if they were more superstitious so that they feared the gods and punishment after death even more than they do, and thus refrained from doing evil.

The way Plutarch puts it ...

Quote

And Epicurus is of opinion that the only proper means to keep men from doing ill is the fear of punishments. So that we should cram them with more and more superstition still, and raise up against them terrors, chasms, frights, and surmises, both from heaven and earth, if their being amazed with such things as these will make them become the more tame and gentle. For it is more for their benefit to be restrained from criminal actions by the fear of what comes after death, than to commit them and then to live in perpetual danger and fear.

So religion is a tool to keep people afraid of punishment after death.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

27. 27 The belief that we cease to exist at death is demoralizing and dispiriting and thus prevents us from enjoying life.

This one really annoys me. Plutarch says

Quote

Wherefore they must needs cut the very throats of them that shall with Epicurus tell them, We men were born once for all, and we cannot be born twice, but our not being must last for ever. *For this will bring them to slight their present good as little, or rather indeed as nothing at all compared with everlastingness, and therefore to let it pass unenjoyed and to become wholly negligent of virtue and action*

The emphasized line is aggravating! So understanding that one ceases to exist should not -- does not-- slight the present!! It makes it all the more special and precious.

Plutarch also denigrates the memory of loved ones...

Quote

If then (as Epicurus saith) the remembrance of a dead friend be a thing every way complacent; we may easily from thence imagine how great a joy they deprive themselves of who [p. 200] think they do but embrace and pursue the phantoms and shades of their deceased familiars, that have in them neither knowledge nor sense, but who never expect to be with them again, or to see their dear father and dear mother and sweet wife, nor have any hopes of that familiarity and dear converse they have that think of the soul with Pythagoras, Plato, and Homer.

I don't expect to "converse" with my deceased loved ones , but remembering times with them brings me joy. I can accept they're not living in the afterlife, and it doesn't diminish the pleasure of recollection. So, with all due respect, *Bite me, Plutarch, you insufferable jerk!*
Egads!