

An Approach to Reading Philosophy

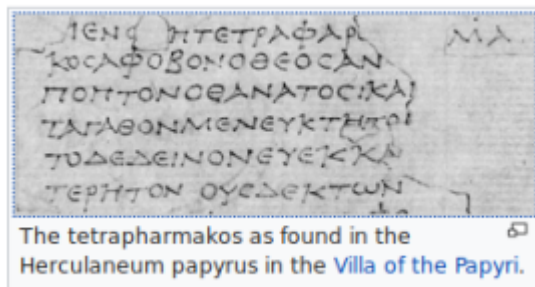
Post by "Cassius" of December 31, 2019 at 4:05 PM

I did not know that about Hicks, Oscar, thank you. I do think I had noticed that Hicks seemed to have a Stoic disposition, and that personal detail may indicate something of relevance.

I think your point is relevant to all the texts but in particular to those from Herculaneum. As I understand it everyone is working from penciled notes made in most cases by some of the original researchers years ago, in which each character is transcribed to something new, such as the facsimile on this page:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetrpharmakos>

...meaning that this caption of this photo is certainly NOT accurate:



but rather what the photo shows is the sketched reconstruction of the researchers -- the original is charred black.

Now for all I know the reconstructionist had the best eyesight and the best knowledge of ancient greek and the best understanding of Epicurus humanly possible -- but I suspect that on all those counts skepticism is warranted. But even if so, this facsimile does not tell us the degree to which these characters were clear, or surmised, and of course there is no context whatsoever before or after this passage. We simply don't know who was writing this, or why, and so to take from this facsimile as it it was handed down from heaven:

.....seems to me to be something very careful about, especially since it is the natural human tendency to scrutinize each word for subtleties of meaning which we simply cannot be sure where intended by the original Epicureans.

So in this case we have to check these transcriptions and translations about other parts of Epicurean philosophy about which we have confidence, and yes the suggested translation is reasonably possible. But it is at best a truncated version of the first four doctrines, and what do we know about how and for what purpose this truncation was derived? Was someone

suggesting that this is all that was important to know? Was that person suggesting that this was *most* important? For whom was this summary intended?

All these questions have to be considered in all of the translations, and Elayne's suggestions are pretty much exactly the way I approach things too.

Don't fear god,	Ἄφοβον ὁ θεός,
Don't worry about death;	ἀνύποπτον ὁ θάνατος
What is good is easy to get,	καὶ τὰγαθὸν μὲν εὐκτῆτον,
What is terrible is easy to endure	τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐκαρτέρητον