

Vaughn (Lewis) - "Living Philosophy"

Post by "Charles" of January 12, 2020 at 8:14 PM

Well said Cassius.

I think there are two parts to the most common misconception, the first being revisionism and strawman-esque argumentation against the philosophy. If Epicurean Philosophy was the minimalist life built on virtue and freedom from mental disturbances, then surely the only point of contention between the dominant Hellenistic philosophies would have been the epistemology and physics, yet the argumentation and disagreements always seem to boil down to **pleasure**. For the Stoics always say that you should be indifferent to pleasure, but not pursue it, and the others say that pleasure itself is evil, but why antagonize the Epicureans as overindulgent hedonists like Diotimus the Stoic did, because if its to be "expected" that they weren't the overindulgent hedonists, he would have been laughed at and his trial would've ended with an innocent verdict.

No, its far easier to mis-characterize your opponents arguments so that you may better defeat them. For us the Stoics are the unemotional and uncaring husks who say

"Do not worry that your sister fell ill, be virtuous and all will be well"

Or the Platonists, in which our straw man might appear as: pseudo-mystics who only speak of philosophy in tricky games to confuse all others to give the image of intelligence

Clearly those two examples are gross caricatures, but the point still stands. It makes little sense to say that Epicurean Philosophy is somehow both the overindulgent and ultra-hedonist school of red wine waterfalls and brothels for every street corner while simultaneously being the school of frugal minimalism where even a grand feast is bread and water, and socializing consists of only platonic friendship, and that we must all limit our desires and pursue only the smallest, and static pleasures of the mind.

Obviously this false schism must be mended. Since EP can only resemble one side to this broken dichotomy, which one is it? This brings me to my next point.

The second reason why I think this misconception could happen is that it is a matter of unwilling ignorance, or taking things only at face value.

If we examine the surviving texts, its easy to see why someone could come to that conclusion of the minimalist perspective, especially when we read L to M, Laertius, and a few of the Selected Fragments (Ive only read Peter St. Andre).

But it's just that, the face value. The same source telling us Epicurus ate only bread and water also tells us that he wrote over 300 books, of which a vast and overwhelming majority has been lost, and only very recently have the papyrus scrolls in Herculaneum begun to be deciphered through new methods of technology that preserves them and reveal the charred characters.

Throughout all of history until perhaps the 20th century (barring DeWitt and a few others), Epicurean Philosophy was always seen as the indulgent hedonist school rather than the Neo-Epicurean one we see today. To assume that EP is the minimalist & removal of pain school given the surviving sources is as ridiculous to assume that its the ultra-hedonistic school that would make even Sade blush.