

Vaughn (Lewis) - "Living Philosophy"

Post by "Cassius" of January 13, 2020 at 4:08 AM

I very much agree with your post, with these comments;

[Quote from Charles](#)

Clearly those two examples are gross caricatures,

In the case of the Stoics I do not think that the example you gave is a caricature. The entire thrust of Stoicism seems to have been explicitly to undermine emotion and convince people of its unimportance. Much of the Stoic literature survives in relatively intact form, and when I read Epictetus there seems no alternative but to believe that the common meaning of "Stoic" is not a misunderstanding, but is exactly what they were seeking to accomplish.

[Quote from Charles](#)

, or taking things only at face value.

If we examine the surviving texts, it's easy to see why someone could come to that conclusion of the minimalist perspective

On this I would suggest that the issue is not that Epicurean philosophy is being taken at face value, but that it is being selectively read, from among fragments that has survived in large part because of their ability to be reconciled with Stoicism by taking them outside the context of the full philosophy.

As you have stated or implied, the thrust of Epicurus' conclusion was that pleasure (a feeling) rather than gods or idealism or rationalism/reason, deserves to be considered the goal Nature has set for life. The Epicureans devoted huge amounts of time to explaining that, most of which no longer exists. In explaining that it is pleasure as a feeling, rather than particular types of pleasure that are individually found to be most pleasing, Epicurus logically included mental pleasures as very important, and also that an environment suitable to enjoying pleasure without distraction (pain) is desirable. Those are the passages on which commentators have focused because they find them compatible with their own views, rather than those which clearly state such things as that Epicurus would not recognize the good without the feelings of sex and other feelings which any ordinary uncorrupted living thing feels to be pleasurable.

Your excerpt from Vaughn illustrates the process. Instead of explaining how Epicurus was providing logical arguments for use in refuting Platonism, which places the letter to Menoecus in context, Vaughn immediately jumps to an unintuitive conclusion which effectively reverses the meaning of the philosophy, amounting to an assertion that when Epicurus used the word

"pleasure" he did not really mean pleasure as we know it. The result is that no one who has not been corrupted by anti-pleasure philosophy is going to find Epicurus appealing, and he is abandoned to that segment of philosophical commentators who have no interest other than making Epicurus sound like he agrees with them - as Stoics.