

Scheduling And Beginning Thoughts for Epicurus Today Podcast

Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2020 at 11:54 AM

I understand why you say that Charles, but I am actually saying the exact opposite. The Letter to Herodotus was the first of the three listed by Diogenes Laertius, and consistent with the presentation in Lucretius, it seems probable that the Epicureans started off confirming new students in the nature of the universe before they instructed them on how to live.

And that makes sense at a very fundamental level, because if indeed the universe had been created by gods, then Plato and the Stoics would be correct -- we should spend our time talking about how the gods want us to live, which means "virtue" in their Platonic/Socratic/Aristotelian sense of the word.

So while we probably should not go line by line and as slowly as we are going through the Lucretius poem, if we devote a couple of sessions to the letter to Herodotus first then that lets us cover the 12 Fundamental Principles, and gives us the foundation so that when we get to the PDs and the VS we have a background on what is meant by pleasure. The letter to Herodotus has the direct references from Epicurus as to how we consider the "feelings" as a standard, and that is essential to the ethics:

And besides we must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us, in order that we may have indications whereby we may judge both the problem of sense perception and the unseen.

(Do a word search for **feelings** within the letter to Herodotus and it occurs numerous times. This sets us up for seeing the role of feelings within the ethics, without which there is no basis for Epicurus asserting the role they should play.)

I think I am beginning to take the position in general that the letter to Menoeceus needs to be among the LAST things presented to a new student of Epicurus, and for better or worse the PDs and the VSs are in a similar category. Although they do contain a general statement about not fearing gods, they don't explain WHY -- if you start with them you are at the position of answering "Why don't we fear the gods" by saying "Because I say so!" and that's not a good answer. And that's because none of these establish within themselves the basic views on the nature of the universe, and on how to think -- they all look back at the points that were discussed first in summary form in the letter to Herodotus and in more detail in "On Nature" (that we have through Lucretius).