

PD01 - Blessed and Imperishable?

Post by "Don" of March 2, 2020 at 6:50 AM

τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει οὔτε ἄλλω παρέχει· ὥστε οὔτε ὀργαῖς οὔτε χάρισι συνέχεται· ἐν ἀσθενεῖ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον.

"The blessed and imperishable being [τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον] has no troubles itself nor causes troubles for others; as a consequence, it is affected by neither anger nor gratitude; because all this would be an indication of weakness, sickness, or lack of strength." (Translation is my own)

Being affected by anger as a sickness or weakness makes sense, but why would being affected by gratitude be a sign of weakness? One conjecture would be that it would show a lack of self-reliance / αὐτάρκεια. If we needed reassurance / affirmation from others and didn't just do things because they were pleasurable, we're not truly living a blessed life. That sense of self-assurance would make one a **μακάριος καὶ ἄφθαρτος**. Blessed, yes. Imperishable? This echoes an idea that, once unnecessary desires are uprooted, they can't come back. But that's a Buddhist concept. Could Epicurus have really been implying that kind of Imperishability?

Some of the senses of **φθαρτος**, the opposite of **ἄφθαρτος**, are "pass away, able to be bribed, adrift." Considering the opposite of these qualities - "not pass away, not able to be bribed, not adrift" - gives a deeper sense to what a mortal life potentially filled with these senses of **ἄφθαρτος** would be like. We know we are mortal. Epicurus and Lucretius proclaim that. So interpreting how we mortals can be imperishable beings isn't readily apparent at first. But this doctrine - all the [Principal Doctrines](#) - have to be applicable to our lives, otherwise of what use are they to us? Epicurus was adamant that philosophy had to be practical and to improve one's life. Re-examining the connotations of **ἄφθαρτος** allows us to see that that idea doesn't have to be a mystical imperishability but one rooted in the here and now.