

PD20 - Commentary on PD 20

Post by "Don" of March 26, 2020 at 5:31 AM

Ἡ μὲν σὰρξ ἀπέλαβε τὰ πέρατα τῆς ἡδονῆς ἄπειρα καὶ ἄπειρος αὐτὴν χρόνος ἀρέσκοι ἄν. ἡ δὲ διάνοια τοῦ τῆς σαρκὸς τέλους καὶ πέρατος λαβοῦσα τὸν ἐπιλογισμὸν καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ τοῦ αἰῶνος φόβους ἐκλύσασα τὸν παντελεῖ βίον παρεσκεύασεν, καὶ οὐθὲν ἔτι τοῦ ἀπείρου χρόνου προσεδεήθη· <οὐ> μὴν ἀλλ' οὔτε ἔφυγε τὴν ἡδονὴν οὔθ' ἠνίκα τὴν ἐξαγωγὴν ἐκ τοῦ ζῆν τὰ πράγματα παρεσκεύαζεν, ὡς ἐλλείπουσά τι τοῦ ἀρίστου βίου κατέστρεφεν.

Saint-Andre translation: The flesh assumes that the limits of joy are infinite, and that infinite joy can be produced only through infinite time. But the mind, reasoning out the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life and therefore has no need of infinite time; yet the mind does not flee from joy, nor when events cause it to exit from life does it look back as if it has missed any aspect of the best life.

Ἡ σὰρξ isn't just "the flesh." Liddell and Scott give the additional definition, citing the Vatican Sayings: II. "the flesh, as the seat of the affections and lusts, fleshly nature, "ἐν τῆ ς. ἡ ἡδονή" Epicur. Sent.18, cf. Sent.Vat. 33." So, Ἡ μὲν σὰρξ ἀπέλαβε τὰ πέρατα τῆς ἡδονῆς **ἄπειρα** can be translated as "Our 'fleshly nature' assumes as its due that the bounds of pleasure are **infinite (without bounds)**..." The flesh feels it is *due* infinite pleasures, and that **ἄπειρος** αὐτὴν χρόνος ἀρέσκοι ἄν. ... only **infinite** time will satisfy them...

ἡ δὲ **διάνοια** τοῦ τῆς σαρκὸς τέλους καὶ πέρατος λαβοῦσα τὸν ἐπιλογισμὸν καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ τοῦ αἰῶνος φόβους ἐκλύσασα τὸν παντελεῖ βίον παρεσκεύασεν Here we find the part preceded by δὲ so this part will contrast with the first part's μὲν section. Contrasting with σὰρξ/σαρκὸς, **διάνοια** is intelligence, understanding. τοῦ τῆς σαρκὸς τέλους καὶ πέρατος are the fleshly nature's goals (τέλους) and boundaries/limits (πέρατος, the word we saw in the first sentence). Nussbaum's Therapy of Desire translates this passage as "Reason... by driving out the fear of eternity (τοῦ αἰῶνος φόβους), makes life complete." "Life complete" is conveyed by τὸν παντελεῖ βίον. I contend that this is one of the more important phrases in the original Greek. This is the kind of life that is produced by following the Epicurean path. Again, we have to delve into Epicurus' words to really appreciate what he's saying. Παντελεῖ derives from παν "all, every" + τέλος "goal, end" but not just any goal or end, the ultimate, fully-accomplished end of something, its fully-realized purpose. So, Epicurus is calling us to a life where he believes we can find that every goal is accomplished, every purpose fulfilled IF we understand the limits of pleasure and desire. That will provide us with τοῦ ἀρίστου βίου "the best life" of all the possible ways of living. Pleasure remains pleasure, but, if we were ruled entirely by our σὰρξ we would feel we deserve - indeed, are due! - infinite pleasure which entails the requirement that we need infinite time and must therefore see death as an evil. However, our διάνοια allows us to make choices and rejections based on a goal of leading both the complete and the best life right here and right now.