

Managing Expectations In The Study of Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of May 9, 2020 at 12:11 PM

Good comments Eugenios. As I was reading them i was thinking you're right: What's IN the cookbook is the issue!

Because even though I think you feel you shifted your answer from cookbooking to [PD10](#), as for me, I really consider the latter part of your post to be the fundamental start of any cookbook.

Isn't a cookbook supposed to be about making appetizing food, and not just anything that's edible?

I feel the same issues of "lumpiness" in our food over and over, as illustrated by a couple of word choices:

(1) In item three, the "BUT." I explain it the same way, but why is our description so focused on "buts" which imply that what we have said before is not clear. Why is it not clear enough to say "choose pleasure and avoid pain" without having to emphasize the BUT DON'T choose unwisely (or some variation). We end up looking like the "wisdom" is the end goal rather than the pleasure, and we end up sounding sometimes like we are talking to stubborn children. Is it really necessary, once we say that pleasure is the good, to have to harp on the fact that some pleasures are going to come at a cost that is not worth that pleasure? (To repeat, I am not complaining about your formulation, I am complaining about our not being in a position to have this more easily understood).

And that leads to:

(2) Your item 6 ("thus leading to pain")

This is another part of the "rhetoric" issue we face. The act of being alive "leads to pain" so we cannot expect to pursue many of the pleasures we value most without some cost in pain. So the continuing underlying issue is HOW we stack the pleasure up against the pain and decide how much pain is worthwhile. Pretty clearly it is incorrect to focus entirely on duration/time, although that is certainly something to consider. I am thinking the problem is in our inability to articulate fully the "intensity" issue (or whatever word we want to use) is a large part of the problem. I think most people understand the "long term vs short term" issue, or at least they can grasp it as soon as they think about it, and they can see that duration/time is not a sufficient analysis. Possibly the issue of "dying for a friend" may be one of the best ways to express that some pleasures are worth pursuing even if they are achievable only briefly and at great cost in pain, and some pains are worth avoiding due to their intensity even by death which (if avoided) might buy us quite a long period of time.

Both of these comments are intended to focus on the issue that the cookbook, or the presentation, or whatever we do to set and manage expectations needs to be able to convey the issues involved and point the way to how the resolution is both individual according to context but also has a great degree of regularity given our nature as humans and the functioning of our faculty of pleasure and pain.

My general criticism is that cookbooks that focus too much on food and wine and other specific pleasures don't communicate these underlying issues that are of pretty much supreme importance, but at the same time, it is also true that cookbooks that are nothing but general analysis are of little help unless they have specific examples of the kinds of decisions that are best to make in particular contexts.

Edit 1: By no means do I intend to criticize Epicurus by saying this, but if we had a longer version of the letter to Menoeceus, which included specific examples of applications of his statements vs only the very high-level statements of principles that are included, we might have been able to avoid many misunderstandings about what he meant. I am sure Epicurus probably gave those specific examples in "On Nature" and other books, and that is why Lucretius seems to almost drown us in detail. So I guess that is why I think it's essential to combine the study of the letter to Menoeceus with Lucretius in order to give life and body to the high-level summary in the letter.