

Managing Expectations In The Study of Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of May 10, 2020 at 1:32 PM

Chapter 1, "Epicurean 'Passions,'" advances the admittedly controversial thesis that the Epicureans draw a distinction between the non-rational and the rational parts of the soul, assigning to the former the *pathē* of pleasure and of pain but to the latter the emotions, for instance, anger, fear, and joy. On this approach, the Epicurean *pathē* ("feelings," "affects") are precisely pleasure and pain, do not involve judgments, and function automatically to indicate the moral value of things (13). Part of Konstan's motivation for defending this position is Epicurus' inclusion of the *pathē*, alongside sensations (*aisthēseis*) and preconceptions (*prolēpseis*), among the criteria of truth (D.L. 10.31): as the non-rational character of sensations guarantees that they yield unmediated and infallible information about external things, so the non-rational character of pleasure and pain constitutes an unmediated and infallible basis of choice and avoidance for humans and animals alike (15). Konstan adduces, in support of his claim, Epicurean texts which closely associate the *pathē* with the *aisthēseis* (notably, Epicurus, *ad Herod.* 37–38, 55, 63, 82). We may add Sextus' report of the Epicurean view of time as "an accident of accidents," in which *pathē* are specified as either pains or pleasures (*M* 10.219–27). But although these texts make it appear likely that, ultimately, all Epicurean *pathē* would be subsumed under "pleasure" and "pain," nonetheless they do not explicitly problematize or discuss the issue, i.e., whether all *pathē* are indeed subsumed under pleasure and pain. Moreover, although the function of *pathē* as criteria of truth precludes the simultaneous formation of judgments, it does not follow that the *pathē* should be assigned to a non-rational part of the soul: some degree of rationalization appears involved in my *pathos* of a sharp pain in the foot or in the pleasure of tasting honey. Criterial infallibility entails that our sensations, preconceptions, and feelings are not affected by judgment, but not necessarily that their functions are located in the non-rational soul. In any case,

lfby Voula
lerlined in

Maybe to be more precise, I don't have a dog in the fight about "rational or non-rational part of the soul" at least at this point, but I think that the part in blue (absence of rationalizing / opinion) is absolutely necessary for something to make sense to be part of the Epicurean "canon of truth." This is where I strongly disagree with the "other Epicureans" or "Epicureans generally" or whatever, who deviated from Epicurus and included more into the canon of truth,

apparently because they did not understand why Epicurus was so adamant about this distinction, as DeWitt points out. (And by doing so they introduce a "feedback loop" which destroys the "neutrality" of the canon and allows "opinion" to take over).

It's not clear to me why Tsouna would want to advocate the position in the parts indicated in red unless she was taking the part of these "other Epicureans" against Epicurus, and she is trying to rescue "reason" to make it more of a component of the canon of truth than Epicurus saw it to be --- and that would be a motivation we would expect many "academics" to take, as a way to water down Epicurus' conclusion and perhaps be accommodating to Epicurus' Platonic/Aristotelian/Stoic enemies.

And I definitely think this part of "managing expectations"..... it's important that people realize that the "Canon of Truth" is not going to mean truth in the sense of "divine revelation" or "absolutely universal ethics" or things like that.