

Elena Nicoli - An Excellent Presentation On Epicurean Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2018 at 3:03 PM

Here is something else that I think is an aspect of this that we have seen on the Facebook group: When the stress is on "I've made the mistake of chasing commercialism / the rat-race and now I see that simple is beautiful" we come at the entire philosophy from the point of someone who has made incorrect decisions and to a greater or lesser extent warped their personality and/or emotions into focusing on the pain of their mistakes. Such people are naturally looking for help - for medicine - and their focus is on reducing pain as their primary goal. And such people are naturally going to think that the full message of Epicurus is "live simply so as to avoid pain."

But what if we approached the philosophy as they must have for generations in the ancient world? What if we approached it as emotionally healthy people - as many if not most young people are because they have not yet been "damaged" by incorrect thinking? What if we approached this from the point of view: "I am young and healthy and happy and I am not afraid of anything - I just want to know how to live my life so I can take charge of it and pursue life with all the gusto I can give it!"

The non-warped, non-damaged person doesn't start from the presumption that life is all about avoiding pain. Such a person wants to know a framework of analysis from which he or she can decide for themselves what to pursue, and how to pursue it. Such people want to know whether the best life is dictated by a god, or by society, or by "virtue" or by some other set of absolute abstractions that they have to follow in order not to waste their lives.

And the answers that such people are looking for in Epicurus include (1) this is your ONLY chance at life (2) there's no god telling you what to do (3) there are no universal abstractions telling you what to do, (4) NATURE tells you what to do through pleasure and pain, and (5) if you grasp the true implications of all this, you are going to pursue pleasure as aggressively (while yes, also intelligently) as you can. And they will realize that the ONLY reason we "live simply" is so that we can maximize pleasure, because otherwise if our goal were solely to avoid pain, we would commit suicide and be done with life.

So not only will the points of interest be different depending on how badly warped the audience is, but the conclusions to be drawn about how to pursue pleasure, and why, are likely to be drastically different depending on that same factor.

I don't believe that Epicurean philosophy would ever have been popular in the ancient world, and certainly not in the Roman world, if the positive/activist interpretation I am describing were

not understood to be the real message of Epicurus.

At least for myself, I want to devote at least as much attention to putting forward the positive full framework that explains WHY the ethical conclusions are correct as I do to helping people who just want a short-cut out of their latest wrong turn.