

# Observation About The Opening Of The Letter To Menoeceus vs The Letters To Pythocles and Herodotus

Post by "Cassius" of December 2, 2019 at 5:53 AM

Observation: Both the letter to Pythocles and the letter to Herodotus start out with a specific detailed greeting explaining the purpose of the letter and saying that these people are being provided a summary of a part of Epicurus' philosophy.

The letter to Menoeceus, in contrast, does not start the same way. It does not identify the reason that prompted the letter, state the purpose of the letter, or refer to it being a summary of the principles of ethics.

The second paragraph does imply that what follows is in explanation of the things Epicurus "used unceasingly to commend to you..." but this is after an introductory paragraph that seems to be floating out of context. Is something missing, or was there something about the rationale

## EPICURUS TO MENOECEUS

self ("that I used to commend **to you**"), that

LET no one when young delay to study philosophy, nor when he is old grow weary of his study. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of his soul. And the man who says that the age for philosophy has either not yet come or has gone by is like the man who says that the age for happiness is not yet come to him, or has passed away. Wherefore both when young and old a man must study philosophy, that as he grows old he may be young in blessings through the grateful recollection of what has been, and that in youth he may be old as well, since he will know no fear of what is to come. We must then meditate on the things that make our happiness, seeing that when that is with us we have all, but when it is absent we do all to win it.

The things which I used unceasingly to commend to you, these do and practice, considering them to be the first principles of the good life. First of all believe that

## EPICURUS TO HERODOTUS

For those who are unable, Herodotus, to work in detail through all that I have written about nature, or to peruse the larger books which I have composed, I have already prepared at sufficient length an epitome of the whole system, that they may keep adequately in mind at least the most general principles in each department, in order that as occasion arises they may be able to assist themselves on the most important points, in so far as they undertake the study of nature. But those also who have made considerable progress in the survey of the main principles ought to bear in mind the scheme of the whole system set forth in its essentials. For we have frequent need of the general view, but not so often of the detailed exposition. Indeed it is necessary to go back on the main principles, and constantly to fix in one's memory enough to give one the most essential comprehension of the truth. And in fact the accurate knowledge of details will be fully discovered, if the general principles in the various departments are thoroughly grasped and borne in mind, for even in the case of one fully initiated the most essential feature in all accurate knowledge is the capacity to make a rapid use of observation and mental apprehension, and (this can be done if everything) is summed up in elementary principles and formulae. For it is not possible for any one to

And the letter to Pythocles in particular mentions this context, and even refers to the letter to Herodotus - but does not refer to the letter to Menoeceus:

## EPICURUS TO PYTHOCLES

CLEON brought me a letter from you in which you continue to express a kindly feeling towards me, which is a just return for my interest in you, and you attempt with some success to recall the arguments which lead to a life of blessedness. You ask me to send you a brief argument about the phenomena of the sky in a short sketch, that you may easily recall it to mind. For you say that what I have written in my other works is hard to remember, even though, as you state, you constantly have them in your hands. I was glad to receive your request and felt constrained to answer it by pleasant expectations for the future. Therefore, as I have finished all my other writings I now intend to accomplish your request, feeling that these arguments will be of value to many other persons as well, and especially to those who have but recently tasted the genuine inquiry into nature, and also to those who are involved too deeply in the business of some regular occupation. Therefore lay good hold on it, keep it in mind, and go through it all keenly, together with the rest which I sent in the small epitome to Herodotus.

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### Post by "Joshua" of December 2, 2019 at 8:57 AM

DeWitt on page 12 holds up the letter to Menoecus as (alone of the extant letters) "composed according to the rules of rhythmical prose". Epicurus in this one letter is writing artfully. Perhaps that includes eschewing his customary synoptic introduction?

Regarding the same letter on page 46-47 he says this;

"Were it not for the survival of this piece we could not be so sure of his ability to write artfully, but possessing this we are justified in believing that other writings of similar merit existed."

So there's something about this letter in Greek that sets it apart stylistically, though if course it surpasses my power to say what that is exactly.

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### Post by "Cassius" of December 2, 2019 at 9:07 AM

Yes that is an excellent observation too -- something is different about this letter. I wonder if [Elli](#) has any insight into the stylistic issues involved? Or whether the name "Menoceus" has any background meaning?

So we know from the other two major letters that Epicurus used the standard format of beginning his letters with an explanation of why he was writing, yet in this one he apparently just launches into a discourse with no context.

And we know (or think we know) that this one as written in a very different style.

The other letters give us at least a small amount of information about the recipient, in telling us why they were written. I wish we know anything at all about who "Menoceus" was, other than that he was someone who apparently had had prior direct dealings with Epicurus.

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of December 2, 2019 at 3:49 PM**

Is there any information showing that the Menoceus letter could have been written significantly earlier or later than the other two, reflecting a development in Epicurus' writing style?

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### **Post by "Cassius" of December 2, 2019 at 5:21 PM**

I have never seen any, Godfrey. I have never seen any information whatsoever about who Menoceus was, or anything about its context. I am not aware that there is any information about it at all other than what is in Diogenes Laertius, which gives very little.

Such was his teaching on things celestial. As regards  
the principles of living and the grounds on which we  
ought to choose some things and avoid others, he writes  
the following letter. But before considering it let us  
explain what he and his followers think about the wise  
man. Injuries are done by men either through hate or

And then this before and after the letter which Bailev represents here by the line of dots so he  
such as belongs to a god, which admits of no increase,  
and the happiness which is concerned with the addition  
and subtraction of pleasures. Now we must proceed to  
the letter.

135 In several works he rejects all kinds of prophecy, and  
specially in the *Shorter Summary* He says, 'Prophecy  
does not exist, and even if it did exist, things that come  
to pass must be counted nothing to us'. So much for  
his theory of morals, which he has discussed more fully  
elsewhere

As far as I know, that is the extent of our knowledge about the letter to Menoeceus.

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### Post by "Elli" of December 3, 2019 at 1:26 PM

Menoecus in greek "Μενουκεύς" derives from the verb (μένω) & the noun (οικεύς), and means the one who stays/lives at his family's house.

Meneoceus, as it is said, was a pupil of Epicurus. For sending him a letter, maybe Meneoceus lived in the city of Lampsacus, when Epicurus was teaching there. In Lampsacus there were many of the friends of Epicurus. 😊

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### Post by "Cassius" of December 3, 2019 at 1:59 PM

Elli do you agree that there is a difference in "style" between the Letter to Menoeceus and the letters to Herodotus and Pythocles?

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### Post by "Elli" of December 3, 2019 at 3:23 PM

It seems to be that the letters to Herodotus and Pythocles, were after their request, and maybe they were teachers in an epicurean school of philosophy that had been established by them in Lampsacus. So, the only need they had, was for a good summary of the works on Physics and celestial phenomena, by Epicurus. The letter to Meneoceus looks like to be addressed in a young man that Epicurus cared for him, as he also lived him behind in Lampsacus with the other friends.

Because who needs more wise exhortations on ethics : a young man or a middle-aged man that was also to Epicurus a very known friend, and for a long life period of time?

And imo here is the answer :

ES 17. It is not the young man who should be thought happy, but the old man who has lived a good life. For the young man at the height of his powers is unstable and meets up (on his way) many coincidentally opinions (i.e. empty beliefs), like a headlong stream. But the old man has come to anchor in old age as though in port, and the good things for which before he hardly hoped he has brought into safe harbor in his grateful recollections.

On the above saying, for caring for and supportive of youth as Epicurus may have been, he also recognized that the young are unstable in their beliefs (unlike, presumably, mature Epicureans), and are therefore dragged in all sorts of directions by the whims of chance or cunning persons. This sort of vacillation and instability, Epicurus implies, is not conducive to bliss and pleasure.

The old man, on the contrary, who has lived out his life well, is presented in a beautiful simile: he is like a sailor who has let down anchor in old age, as if in a safe harbor. He is to wander no more. Better yet, all those "goods" i.e. his experiences that made him also to be prudent and happy that once seemed to him hard to attain, he now guards safely in the repository of his own grateful memory of good times past.

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## Post by "Cassius" of December 3, 2019 at 3:51 PM

Elli -- As quoted by Joshua above, DeWitt says that the letter to Menoeceus is composed in a different "style" of Greek writing than are the other two letters. Do you agree that the letter to Menoeceus seems more "elegant" or is written in a different style of grammar?

### Quote

DeWitt on page 12 holds up the letter to Menoeceus as (alone of the extant letters) "composed according to the rules of rhythmical prose". Epicurus in this one letter is

writing artfully.

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### **Post by “Elli” of December 3, 2019 at 3:59 PM**

Yes, when we write to someone for humans' fears, desires, feelings etc the style seems to be more emotional. I do not find it "artful". The style of writing "artfully" was only by Plato. **I found it that is written emotionally and with clarity.** Moreover, in all Epicurus letters the words, the grammar and the syntax are in accordance with the Attic greek language.

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### **Post by “Elli” of December 3, 2019 at 4:13 PM**

In addition: Scientific papers and works have nothing to do with letters that are addressed to some of our young friends that within we exhort them on some wise thoughts and on how they shall live for the achievement of the goal of pleasure and eudaemonia. 😊