

VS09 - Clever Writing from Epicurus + Commentary

Post by “Don” of March 28, 2020 at 10:04 AM

This is a clever bit of writing from Epicurus. The original Greek reads "κακὸν ἀνάγκη, ἀλλ' οὐδεμία ἀνάγκη ζῆν μετὰ ἀνάγκης." Note those three occurrences of ἀνάγκη/ἀνάγκης. The word itself means force, constraint, or necessity; so a literal translation would be something like "An evil, necessity (is); but (there is) no necessity to live in the midst of necessity." This retains the clever wordplay but is honestly a little clunky in English. To get the import of the statement, a paraphrase may be better. Consider what he is saying. Being constrained in your choices is an evil. If you have only one choice - or feel you only have one choice - that is an evil. However, we have free will, so we are not required to live having our choices curtailed and constrained. Even if we make choices we don't want to make, we are exercising our free will. "I don't want to go to work today, but I have to." No, you don't. You could quit. But are you ready to face the consequences of quitting your job? You can consciously decide today is not the day I quit. I make the decision to get up and do the work. Likewise, maybe getting a new job is the right decision. Weigh your options. Exercise your faculty of choice and rejection. You are not forced to be forced to do something. Make your choices and rejections wisely.