Pierre-Marie Morel - "The Epicurean 'Up To Us' - Not To Be Proved"

Post by “Cassius” of June 27, 2021 at 8:53 AM

I haven't had a chance to look at this but it appears directly on point with the forum topic - https://www.academia.edu/42855461/Pierr...=download-paper

This paper deals with the Epicurean conception of responsibility. There are many issues about the so-called Epicurus’ demonstration of freedom. Now, if we consider Epicurus’ remains, it is not obvious that Epicurus’ texts explicitly demonstrate the eph’ hêmin thesis. It will be argued, that the Epicurean eph’ hêmin, in this context, is not a demonstrandum because responsibility is a primary evidence. Arguments in this sense are of three kinds: cosmological, ethical and epistemological. I will show that Epicurus, when he depicts the sage’s life and behaviour, invokes the cosmological conditions of action, particularly in Letter to Menoeceus, arguing that the sage does not absolutely depend on a causal chain. Then I will focus on the arguments he develops in his Peri phuseôs about the ethical consequences of the denial of human freedom. Finally I will deal with the logical absurdity of such a denial. I will defend the view that this use of the eph’ hêmin thesis is closely connected with the Epicurean theory of knowledge and with its logical requirements.

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The Epicurean 'up to us': not to be proved

Pierre-Marie Morel

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Epicureanism is no doubt a philosophy of freedom, at least in two ways. The first one is negative: the Epicurean wise man is free of vain desires, like political honours or the accumulation of wealth; he is also free of fear (when facing death, for instance), and more generally free of false opinions, like the illusion of unlimited pleasures or the belief in the immortality of soul, all such opinions being obstacles to happiness. This is the main feature of the sage's *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency, whose foremost result or "fruit" (*karpos*) is precisely freedom (*eleutheria*); as Epicurus himself says,[1] Epicurean freedom has also its positive side: the epicurean wise man knows that each human being is able to decide and act as a responsible agent. While many people impute unfortunate events to fate, to physical necessity or to the severity of the gods, the sage is well aware of his *own* capacity to act, of his *own* agency. Taken in this way, Epicureanism clearly endorses what I shall call "the *eph' hêmin* thesis", i.e. the belief that most of our actions are up to us. This is the case, at least, for the most important things we can do in order to reach our goals, and consequently happiness.