

Letter to Menoecus - On Personal Responsibility

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 9, 2025 at 3:43 PM

Here are two translations of sections 133,134, and portion of 135, with special emphasis on the bold sections:

Saint-Andre:

"In short, whom do you consider better than someone who holds pious opinions about the gods, who is always fearless in the face of death, who has reasoned out the natural goal of life, and who has understood that the limit of good things is easy to fulfill and easy to achieve, whereas the limit of bad things is either short-lived or causes little pain? **Someone who laughs at destiny, which is asserted by some to be the master of all things? For he holds that we are responsible for what we achieve, even though some things happen by necessity, some by chance, and some by our own power, because although necessity is not accountable he sees that chance is unstable whereas the things that are within our power have no other master, so that naturally praise and blame are inseparably connected to them.**

Indeed he sees that it would be better even to cleave to the myths about the gods (since that leaves some hope of prevailing upon them through worship) than to be subject to the destiny of the scientists (since that way lies an inexorable necessity). And such a man holds that Fate is not a god (as most people believe) because a god does nothing disorderly, and he holds that Fate is not an uncertain cause because **nothing good or bad with respect to a completely happy life is given to men by chance, although it does provide the beginnings of both great goods and great evils.**

And he considers it better to be rationally unfortunate than irrationally fortunate, since it is better for a beautiful choice to have the wrong results than for an ugly choice to have the right results just by chance."

Bailey: [133] "For indeed who, think you, is a better man than he who holds reverent opinions concerning the gods, and is at all times free from fear of death, and has reasoned out the end ordained by nature? He understands that the limit of good things is easy to fulfill and easy to attain, whereas the course of ills is either short in time or slight in pain; **he laughs at (destiny), whom some have introduced as the mistress of all things. (He thinks that with us lies the chief power in determining events, some of which happen by necessity) and some by chance, and some are within our control; for while necessity**

cannot be called to account, he sees that chance is inconstant, but that which is in our control is subject to no master, and to it are naturally attached praise and blame.

[134] For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation. As to chance, he does not regard it as a god as most men do (for in a god's acts there is no disorder), nor as an uncertain cause (of all things) **for he does not believe that good and evil are given by chance to man for the framing of a blessed life, but that opportunities for great good and great evil are afforded by it.**

[135] He therefore thinks it better to be unfortunate in reasonable action than to prosper in unreason. For it is better in a man's actions that what is well chosen (should fail, rather than that what is ill chosen) should be successful owing to chance."

Just recently I heard a song with the following chorus lyrics: "I'm living in a world I created for myself" -- which to me sounds very "Epicurean", but also seems a bit daunting because then I am challenged to think about my possessions and the habits in my life and whether or not I chose them, or if I just went along with what everyone else is doing. And also: habits of "doing" influence habits of "thinking". And: what kind of habits of thinking do I want to have. So lots to contemplate.

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Also, should add here...the quality and number of friendships.