

AFDIA - Chapter Thirteen - Text and Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of February 15, 2019 at 6:58 PM

CHAPTER XIII.

Night's refreshing airs fanned the cheeks of Theon, and rustled the myrtle on his brow; but the subtle fever of love which swept through his veins, and throbbed in his heart and temples, was beyond their cooling influence. The noisy business of life had now given place in the streets to noisy merriment. The song and the dance sounded from the open portals; and the young votaries of Bacchus, in all the frenzy of the god, rushed from the evening banquet, to the haunts of midnight excess, while the trembling lover glided past to the stolen interview, shrinking even from the light of Day's pale sister. Theon turned abruptly from the crowd, and sought instinctively a public walk, at this hour always private, where he had often mused on the mysteries of philosophy, and taxed his immature judgment to hold the balance between the doctrines of her contending schools. No thoughts so deep and high now filled his youthful fancy. He wandered on, his senses steeped in delirium not less potent than that of wine, until his steps were suddenly arrested by a somewhat rude encounter with a human figure, advancing with a pace more deliberate than his own. He started backwards and his eyes met those of Cleanthes. The stoic paused a moment, then moved to pass on. But Theon, however little he might have desired such a companion at such a moment, hailed him by name, and placed himself at his side. Again Cleanthes gazed on him in silence; when Theon, following the direction of his glance, raised a hand to his temples, and removed, with a conscious blush, the offending garland. He held it for a moment; then, placing it in his bosom — "You misjudge this innocent token; — a pledge of acknowledgment for a life redeemed from the waves."

"Would that I might receive a pledge of the redemption of thy virtue, Theon, from the flood of destruction! For thy sake I have opened the volumes of this smooth deceiver. And shall a few fair words and a fairer countenance shield such doctrines from opprobrium? Shall he who robs virtue of her sublimity, the gods of their power, man of his immortality, and creation of its providence, pass for a teacher of truth, and expounder of the laws of nature? Where is thy reason, Theon? where thy moral sense? to see, in doctrines such as these, aught but impiety and crime, or to imagine, that he, who advocates them, can merit aught but the scorn of the wise, and the opprobrium of the good?"

"I know not such to be the doctrines of Epicurus," said the youth, "and you will excuse my farther reply, until I shall have examined the philosophy you so bitterly, and apparently so justly condemn."

"The philosophy? honor it not with the name."

"Nay," returned Theon with a smile, "There are so many absurdities honored with that appellation, in Athens, that the compliment might pass unchallenged, although applied to one less worthy than, in my eyes, appears the sage of Gargettium. But," preventing the angry interruption of the stoic, "my slowness to judge and to censure offends your enthusiasm. The experience of three days has taught me this caution. My acquaintance, as yet, is rather with the philosopher than the philosophy; my prejudices at first were equally strong against both. Having discovered my error with respect to one, ought I not to read, listen, and examine, before I condemn the other. And, the rather, as all that I have heard in the garden has hitherto convinced my reason, and awakened my admiration and love."

"Permit me the question," said Cleanthes, stopping short, and fixing his piercing glance on the countenance of his companion — "Honor ye the Gods, and believe ye in a creating cause, and a superintending Providence?"

"Surely I do," said Theon.

"How, then, venerate ye the man who proclaims his doubt of both?"

"So, in my hearing, has never the son of Neocles."

"But he has and does in the hearing of the world."

"I have so heard, and ranked it among the libels of his enemies."

"He has so written, and the fact is acknowledged by his friends."

"I will read his works," said Theon, "and question the writer. A mind more candid, whatever be its errors, exists not, I am persuaded, than that of Epicurus; I should have said also, a mind more free of errors. But he has taught me to think no mind, however wise, infallible."

"Call ye such doctrines, errors? I should rather term them crimes."

"I object not to the word," said Theon. "I will examine into this. The Gods have ye in their keeping! Good night." They entered the city, and the friends divided.

Post by "Cassius" of April 17, 2022 at 2:58 PM

PROGRAMMING NOTE FOR THE ZOOM BOOK REVIEW:

Chapter 13 is very short, so we will combine discussion of it with Chapter 14 .

Post by “Cassius” of April 30, 2022 at 10:53 AM

Note For the AFDIA Zoom Book Review meeting of 5/1/22: Chapter 13 is very short, and both 13 and 14 focus on the issue of [Epicurean Gods](#), so we will combine discussion of the two chapters- so please read both Chapter 13 and 14 for our discussion Sunday May 1.

[A Few Days In Athens - Chapter By Chapter Review](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 1, 2022 at 1:06 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"I will read his works," said Theon, "and question the writer.

This brings up a question, which may be answered somewhere else already, yet here it is --

Back then it was said that Epicurus did not teach publicly. And we know he wrote many books, and copies were given out (or sold?) And this was a way to convey the teachings, and also this might have served the purpose of preventing errors in understanding, or errors in incorrect repetition. [Think of the game of "telephone" in which children sit in a circle and whisper a sentence into the ear of the person sitting next to them, and by the end of the circle that phrase is very different than the original].

The question is: Did Epicurus actually have people read the teachings themselves instead of giving lectures?

Post by “Don” of May 1, 2022 at 2:27 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Back then it was said that Epicurus did not teach publicly.

I think that just means he taught in his private property and not in the agora or the stoa. Book 28 of In Nature is written like a lecture with Metrodorus playing a supporting role.

Post by “Joshua” of May 1, 2022 at 3:28 PM

Specifically, he did not teach in public in the *Athenian* period of his life; neither in the agora, nor in the Gymnasia (of which the Academy and the Lyceum were two). The Gymnasia were governed by somewhat strict rules, as they were constructed and operated for the training and education of the next generation of male citizens--the very future of the city-state.

Before Epicurus began his brief tenure in Lampsacus (where he developed several lasting and important friendships), he was more or less driven out of Mytilene for his teachings. This must have been an education of a kind, but there was something else to keep him on guard when he got to Athens: the memory of the trial of Socrates, on the charges of impiety and corrupting the youth. Sure, that was a century before, and maybe things change. But a century and a half before *that*, the Athenians sentenced another man to death, a philosopher named Anaxagoras. *His* crime was also impiety; he was accused of materialism (true enough in his case, though not in Socrates'), and this first thinker to bring philosophy to Athens escaped death only by being exiled from her.

And yet, in the time of Socrates, Anaxagoras' books were circulating widely in Athens and could be had in the market for a drachma. Preposterous? Certainly! But that was the point; what was said in private, or merely committed to paper and circulated, was of little enough concern to the City's elite. A brazen tongue must occasionally be silenced; the idea that animated it was tolerated to persist.

In any case, Anaxagoras (who thought, among other things, that the sun and moon were made of rock) secured his safety by fleeing to, of all places, Lampsacus! Athens went on to become an emblem of free-thought, Lampsacus, to be forgotten. That is the way of things, I suppose.

Post by “Cassius” of May 1, 2022 at 4:20 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Back then it was said that Epicurus did not teach publicly.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The question is: Did Epicurus actually have people read the teachings themselves instead of giving lectures?

Yes I agree with what both Don and Joshua have written. I too have read the kind of statement you are citing, but I think that's another one of many exaggerations, for exactly the reasons Don and Joshua cite. I think the evidence supports the view that Epicurus was careful in choosing his forums, but there's no reason at all to think that he confined himself to writing, or to only small groups of intimate friends.

Post by “Cassius” of May 1, 2022 at 4:23 PM

I am going to put most of the notes on the discussion we will have tonight under Chapter 14, where the heart of the discussion takes place, rather than here under Thirteen.

As I was reviewing these two chapters this afternoon, it keep hitting me that maybe the one thing Chapter 13 really stands for (other than setting out the blasphemy charges against Epicurus) is that instead of:

"A Few Days In Athens"

the title could have been:

"A Few Days Spent in Athens By A Young Person And the Mistakes He Makes Conversing With Philosophers While Never Cracking Open A Book!"