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Epicurus Vaticanus

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While preparing a critical edition of Diogenes Laertius for the Bibliotheca Teubneriana, I have collated recently the *Gnomologium Vaticanum Epicureum* as preserved in cod. Vat. gr. 1950, saec. XIV, fol.401^v–404^v. The Vatican collection of the aphorisms of Epicurus was first published by Karl Wotke (in 1888), then by Peter Von der Mühl (Teubner, 1922), followed by Cyril Bailey (Oxford, 1926), Graziano Arrighetti (Turin, 1960; 1973), and finally by Jean Bollack (Paris, 1975).¹

On this occasion, I shall limit myself to trying to solve an old problem—the corrupt text of the last two aphorisms of the collection (Nos. 80 and 81). I think aphorism No. 80 should read as follows (printed here correctly for the first time):

Νέω πρώτη σωτηρίας μοῖρα τῆς ἡλικίας τήρησις καὶ φυλακὴ τῶν πάντα
μολυνόντων κατὰ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τὰς οἰστρούδεις.

For a young man the best means of preserving his well-being is to watch over his youth and to guard against whatever defiles (stains or spoils) everything because of “the maddening desires.”

On fol.404^v of V, our aphorism opens with a *v.ω*, which can hardly

¹ Karl Wotke and Hermann Usener, “Epikureische Spruchsammlung,” *Wiener Studien* 10 (1888) 175–201 (Greek text, pp. 191–198); *Epicuri Epistulae tres et Ratae Sententiae*, ed. P. Von der Mühl (Teubner, Leipzig 1922; repr. Teubner, Stuttgart 1966), pp. 60–69; Cyril Bailey, *Epicurus: The Extant Remains* (Oxford 1926; repr. Hildesheim 1970), pp. 106–119 and 375–388; *Epicuro, Opere: Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e note* di Graziano Arrighetti (Turin 1960; 2nd ed., 1973), pp. 138–157 and 505–520; Jean Bollack, *La pensée du plaisir. Épicure: textes moraux, commentaires* (Paris. Les Éditions de Minuit. 1975), pp. 409–563.

be anything else but νέω, “for a young man.” There are two more instances of an Epicurean ethical aphorism opening with Νέος without the article. Aphorism No. 17 from our collection reads: Οὐ νέος μακαριστός, ἀλλὰ γέρον βεβιωκῶς καλῶς. And a similar aphorism by Metrodorus Epicureus (ap. Stobaeus II. 31. 67 Wachsmuth) reads: Νέος ἐν πολυτελείᾳ βρώμασι καὶ ποτοῖς ἔτι δὲ ἀφροδισίοις ἀναστρεφόμενος λέληθεν ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῷ θέρει τὴν χλαῖναν κατατρίβων.

Consequently, the reading νέω seems to me to be as safe as it is palaeographically possible. Wotke, however, saw in the manuscript a P..ω (“P..ω soll V[aticanus] geben”), Von der Mühl, F.:ίω (“prima littera aut Γ aut Π fuisse videtur”), and Bollack, P..ω. They then engaged in improbable conjectures. Wotke and Bailey adopted W. von Hartel’s ἔστιν, while Von der Mühl printed γενναίω and conjectured γησιώ. But Konstantin Horna (in 1931)² correctly suggested νέω, and Arrighetti adopted it. In brief, the readings of Wotke, Von der Mühl, Bailey and Bollack are wrong.

The second word of our aphorism is a clear πρώτη. It was printed by Wotke (Bailey and Bollack), but omitted by Von der Mühl, Horna, and Arrighetti. Probably they relied upon the misleading entry in Wotke’s apparatus criticus, which reads: “Ἔστιν πρώτη] P..ω soll V geben : verb. H[artel]; man könnte auch Παμπρώτη vermuten.” But in fact V has: ν’ω πρώτη. The expression, ἡ πρώτη μοῖρα, moreover, is of significance. It means, “the *first* role,” “the *best* way,” “the *safest* means.”

Finally, the closing picturesque expression of our aphorism—αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι αἱ οἰστρώδεις—is a *deliberate* reminiscence of Plato on the part of Epicurus (*Tim.* 91 b 6; *Laws* V, 734 a 4).³

Now, this vivid Platonic metaphor—“the gadfly-like desires,” which sting man to madness, converting him into an irrational animal—may help us to solve the other textual problem at the end of our collection. Perhaps a similar poetic picturesque expression is hiding in the corruption of aphorism 81. I would like to suggest the following reading of this aphorism.

Οὐ λύει τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ταραχὴν οὐδὲ τὴν ἀξιόλογον ἀπογεννᾶ χαρὰν οὔτε πλοῦτος ὑπάρχων ὁ μέγιστος οὔθ’ ἢ παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς τιμὴ καὶ περιβλεψίς οὔτ’ ἄλλο τι τῶν παρὰ τὰς οἰζυράς <ἀπλ>έτους αἰτίας.

The disturbance of the soul cannot be dispelled nor the genuine joy be created either by the possession of the greatest wealth, or by the esteem and admiration one may enjoy in the eyes of the populace, or by

² *Wiener Studien* 49 (1931), 34.

³ As, e.g., Bollack (p. 560) had pointed out.

anything else deriving from the wretched unlimited motives (or causes of desires).

For the suggested οἰζυρὰς <ἀπλ>έτους the manuscript seems to offer, ἄζυρ'σ ἔτους. Wotke read ἄζυροῖστος, Von der Mühl, ἄζυρισι(έ?)τους, and Bollack, ἄζ.ρ.σιτους. Now, in view of the fact that our scribe wrote in aphorism No. 2, ἀθάνατος, for the correct, ὁ θάνατος, I would think that ἄζυρ'σ could be none other than the poetic expression, οἰζυρὰς, "wretched, toilsome, dreary, or trouble-causing." As for the ἔτους, I think it is lacunose, being the ending of another attribute of the keyword, αἱ αἰτίαι, "the motives or causes of desires." The manuscript abounds in similar—two to three letters long—lacunae. For example, in aphorism No. 14 the word $\bar{\kappa}\sigma$ (= κύριος) is missing (extant in Stobaeus); in aphorism No. 43 φείδε . . . is a sure φείδε<σθαι> (from Demosthenes 24. 172); in aphorism No. 55 our scribe offers τὸ γένος for the correct τὸ γε<γο>νός (Usener); in aphorism No. 63 he writes καθάριος for the correct καθαριό<τη>ς (Von der Mühl); in aphorism No. 67 he omits <μῆ> after the word τὸ πρᾶγμα (Usener), and so on.

Consequently, the suggested supplement, <ἀπλ>έτους for the transmitted ἔτους, seems to be in accord with the scribe's practice. Ἄπλετος is a suitable poetic synonym for Epicurus' key terms ἄπειρος and ἀόριστος, when applied to the motives or causes of desires, as is the case with our aphorism. Its sense is "boundless, unlimited, immense," with the overtone, "excessive, and thus harmful." Consider these similar expressions of Epicurus: Aphorism No. 8 from our collection (= *Ratae sententiae*, No. 15), Ὁ τῆς φύσεως πλοῦτος καὶ ὠρισται καὶ εὐπόριστός ἐστιν, ὁ δὲ τῶν κενῶν δοξῶν εἰς ἄπειρον ἐκπίπτει; Aphorism No. 63, ὁ δι' ἀοριστίαν ἐκπίπτων; Aphorism No. 59, Ἄπληστον οὐ γαστήρ, ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοὶ φασιν, ἀλλ' ἡ δόξα ψευδῆς ὑπὲρ τοῦ <τῆς> γαστρὸς ἀορίστου πληρώματος; *Ratae Sententiae* No. 10, τὸ πέρασ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν; No. 20, Ἡ μὲν σὰρξ ἀπέλαβε τὰ πέρατα τῆς ἡδονῆς ἄπειρα. . . . The idea of "unlimited and excessive desires" is also clearly expressed in the word συνείροντες of Epicurus' *Letter to Menoecus* 132, Οὐ γὰρ πότοι καὶ κῶμοι συνείροντες οὐδ' ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδ' ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα φέρει πολυτελής τράπεζα τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾶ βίον. . . . The word implies, "continuous pleasures, night after night."

For the suggested reading, παρὰ τὰς οἰζυρὰς <ἀπλ>έτους αἰτίας, scholars usually follow Usener's emendation, παρὰ τὰς ἀδιορίστους αἰτίας. So did Wotke, Bailey, Arrighetti and others. This reading, however, does not find support in the manuscript. Incidentally, ἀδιορίστος would mean, "undefined, indefinite, loose," and not

“unlimited, boundless.” That is why I find Bailey’s commentary on the text, τῶν παρὰ τὰς ἀδιορίστους αἰτίας, unconvincing; it reads: “lit. ‘things connected with unlimited causes’, i.e. causes of unlimited desire, such as there is for wealth, honour, power, &c.”⁴

One final note on the sense of παρὰ here. Contrary to Bollack’s recent comment, “il est préférable de faire παρὰ signifier *au delà de, en dehors de . . .*,”⁵ I think that παρὰ with accusative usually means in Epicurus, “owing to, due to, depending on.” Compare, e.g., *Letter to Pythocles* 111, τὴν τε ἀφάνισιν τούτων γίνεσθαι παρὰ τὰς ἀντικειμένας ταύταις αἰτίας; or *Ratae Sententiae* No. 29, αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι αἱ παρὰ κενὴν δόξαν γινόμεναι; and especially No. 30, . . . παρὰ κενὴν δόξαν αὐται (αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι) γίνονται, καὶ οὐ παρὰ τὴν ἑαυτῶν φύσιν οὐ διαχέονται ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κενοδοξίαν.

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⁴ *Op. cit.* (above, note 1), pp. 119 and 388.—The conjecture suggested by Emil Thomas, *Hermes* 27 (1892), 35, ἀδιοσχυρίστους, “worauf man sich nicht stützen kann,” “unreliable,” is palaeographically even less likely (in addition to the fact that this word is documented nowhere).

⁵ *Op. cit.* (above, note 1), p. 562 f.