

Discourses Book II, Section V

“How Greatness of Mind {megalophrosune} is consistent with Care {epimeleia}”

By Epictetus Tr. George Long Ed. R Cream

THINGS themselves (materials) are indifferent;¹ but the use of them is not indifferent.

How then shall a man preserve firmness and tranquility, and at the same time be careful and neither rash nor negligent?

By imitating those who play at games. The dice are variable; the pieces are variable. How do I know what the cast will be? But it is my business to manage carefully and dexterously, whatever happens.² Thus then in life also the chief business is this: distinguish and separate things, and say, Externals are not in my power: will is in my power. Where shall I seek the good and the bad? Within, in the things which are my own. But in what is controlled by others, count nothing good or evil, profitable or hurtful, or any such thing.

What then? are we to treat these in a careless way?

By no means; for this, on the other hand, would be a perversion of the will, and so contrary to nature. But we are to act with care, because the use of our materials is not indifferent; and at the same time with calmness and tranquillity, because the materials themselves[1122] are uncertain. For where a thing is not uncertain, there no one can restrain or compel me. Where I am capable of being restrained or compelled, the acquisition does not depend upon me; nor is it either good or evil. The use of it, indeed, is either good or evil; but that does depend upon me. It is difficult, I own, to blend and unite tranquillity in accepting, and energy in using, the facts of life; but it is not impossible; if it be, it is impossible to be happy. How do we act in a voyage? What is in my power? To choose the pilot, the sailors, the day, the hour. Afterwards comes a storm. What have I to care for? My part is performed. This matter belongs to another, to the pilot. But the ship is sinking; what then have I to do? That which alone I can do; I submit to being drowned, without fear, without clamor, or accusing God; but as one who knows that what is born must likewise die. For I am not eternity, but a man, - a part of the whole, as an hour is of the day. I must come like an hour, and like an hour must pass away. What signifies it whether by drowning or by a fever? For, in some way or other, pass I must.

This is just what you will see those doing who play at ball skilfully. No one cares about the ball³ as being good or bad, but about throwing and catching it. In this therefore is the skill, in this the art, the quickness, the judgment, so that even if I spread out my lap I may not be able to catch it, [1123] and another, if I throw, may catch the ball. But if with perturbation and fear we receive or throw the ball, what kind of play is it then, and wherein shall a man be steady, and how shall a man see the order in the game? But one will say, Throw; or Do not throw; and another will say, You have thrown once. This is quarrelling, not play.

Socrates then knew how to play at ball. How? By playing in the court where he was tried. “Tell me,” he says, “Anytus, how do you say that I do not believe in God. The Daemons (δαίμονες), who are they, think you? Are they not sons of Gods, or compounded of gods and men?” When Anytus admitted this, Socrates said, “Who then, think you, can believe that there are mules (half asses), but not asses;” and this he said as if he were playing at ball.⁴ And what was the ball in that case? Life, chains, banishment, a drink of poison, separation from wife and leaving children orphans. These were the things with which he was playing; but still he did play and threw the ball skilfully. So we should do: we must employ all the care of the players, but show the same indifference about the ball. For we ought by all means to apply our art to some external material, not as valuing the material, but, whatever it may be, showing our art in it. Thus too the weaver does not make wool, but exercises his art upon such as he receives. Another gives you food and property and is able to take them away and your poor body also. [1124] When then you have received the material, work on it. If then you come out (of the trial) without having suffered any thing, all who meet you will congratulate you on your escape; but he who knows how to look at such things, if he shall see that you have behaved properly in the matter, will commend you and be pleased with you; and if he shall find that you owe your escape to any want of proper behavior, he will do the contrary. For where rejoicing is reasonable, there also is congratulation reasonable.

How then is it said that some external things are according to nature and others contrary to nature?
Only when we are viewed as isolated individuals.

I will allow that it is natural for the foot (for instance) to be clean. But if you take it as a foot, and not as a mere isolated thing, it will be fit that it should walk in the dirt, and tread upon thorns; and sometimes that it should even be cut off, for the good of the whole; otherwise it is no longer a foot. We should reason in some such manner concerning ourselves. What are you? A man. If you consider yourself as detached from other men, it is according to nature to live to old age, to be rich, to be healthy. But if you consider yourself as a man and a part of a certain whole, it is for the sake of that whole that at one time you should be sick, at another time take a voyage and run into danger, and at another time be in want, and in some cases die prematurely. Why then are you troubled? Do you not know, that as a foot is no longer a foot if it is detached from the body, [1125] so you are no longer a man if you are separated from other men. For what is a man?⁵ A part of a state, of that first which consists of Gods and of men; then of that which is called⁶ next to it, which is a small image of the universal state. What then must I be brought to trial; must another have a fever, another sail on the sea, another die, and another be condemned? Yes, for it is impossible in such a body, in such a universe of things, among so many living together, that such things should not happen, some to one and others to others. It is your duty then since you are come here, to say what you ought, to arrange these things as it is fit.⁷ Then some one says, "I shall charge you with doing me wrong." Much good may it do you: I have done my part; but whether you also have done yours, you must look to that; for there is some danger of this too, that it may escape your notice.

Notes

1 The materials (ὑλαι) on which man works are neither good nor bad, and so they are, as Epictetus names them, indifferent. But the use of things, or of material, is not indifferent. They may be used well or ill, conformably to nature or not.

2 Terence says (*Adelphi*, iv. 7)— *Si illud, quod est maxime opus, jactu non cadit, Illud quod cecidit forte, id arte ut corrigas.*

'Dexterously' is arte, 'τεχνικῶς' in Epictetus.—Upton.

3 The word is ἀρπαστόν, which was also used by the Romans. One threw the ball and the other caught it. Chrysippus used this simile of a ball in speaking of giving and receiving (*Seneca*, *De Beneficiis*, ii. 17). Martial has the word (*Epig.* iv. 19) 'Sive harpasta manu pulverulenta rapis'; and elsewhere.

4 In Plato's *Apology* c. 15, Socrates addresses Meletus; and he says, it would be equally absurd if a man should believe that there are foals of horses and asses, and should not believe that there are horses and asses. But Socrates says nothing of mules, for the word mules in some texts of the *Apology* is manifestly wrong

5 Compare Antoninus, ii. 16, iii. 11, vi. 44, xii. 36; and Seneca, *de Otio Sap.* c. 31; and Cicero, *De Fin.* iii. 19.

6 ἀπόλυτοι. Compare Antoninus, x. 24, viii. 34.

7 He tells some imaginary person, who hears him, that since he is come into the world, he must do his duty in it.

Discourses Book IV, Section XII
"On Taking Care {Prosokhe}"

By Epictetus Tr. Thomas Wentworth Higginson Ed. R Cream

When you cease to take care for a little while, do not fancy that you may recommence whenever you please; but remember this, that by means of the fault of to-day, your affairs must necessarily be in a worse condition for the future. The first and worst evil is that there arises a habit of neglect; and then a habit of postponing effort, and constantly procrastinating as to one's successes and good behavior and orderly thought and action. Now, if procrastination as to anything is advantageous, it [2206] must be still more advantageous to omit it altogether; but if it be not advantageous, why do you not take care all the time? "I would play to-day." What then? Ought you not to take proper care about it? "I would sing." But why not take proper care about it? For there is no part of life exempted, about which care are not needed. For will you do anything the worse by taking care, and the better by neglect? What else in life is best performed by heedless people? Does a smith forge the better by heedlessness? Does a pilot steer more safely by heedlessness? Or is any other, even of the minutest operations, best performed heedlessly? Do you not perceive that, when you have let your mind loose, it is no longer in your power to call it back, either to propriety, or modesty, or moderation? But you do everything at haphazard; you merely follow your inclinations.

"To what, then, am I to direct my care? "

Why, in the first place, to those universal maxims which you must always have at hand; and not sleep, or arise, or drink, or eat, or converse without them : that no one is the master of another's will; and that it is in the will alone that good and evil lie. No one, therefore, is my master, either to procure me any good, or to involve me in any evil; but I alone have the disposal of myself with regard to these things. Since these, then, are secured to me, what need have I to be troubled about externals? What [2207] tyrant is formidable? What disease? What poverty? What offence? "I have not pleased such a one." Is he my concern then? Is he my conscience? "No." Why, then, do I trouble myself any further about him? "But he is thought to be of some consequence." Let him look to that; and they who think him so. But I have One whom I must please, to whom I must submit, whom I must obey, - God, and those who surround him. He has intrusted me with myself, and made my will subject to myself alone, having given me rules for the right use of it. If I follow the proper rules in syllogisms, in convertible propositions, I do not heed or regard any one who says anything contrary to them. Why, then, am I vexed at being censured in matters of greater consequence? What is the reason of this perturbation? Nothing else, but that in this instance I want practice. For every science despises ignorance and the ignorant; and not only the sciences, but even the arts. Take any shoemaker, take any smith you will, and he may laugh at the rest of the world, so far as his own business is concerned.

In the first place, then, these are the maxims we must have ready, and do nothing without them, but direct the soul to this mark; to pursue nothing external, nothing that belongs to others, but as he who has the power has appointed. Things controllable by will are to be pursued always; and the rest as may be permitted. Besides this, we must remember who [2208] we are, and what name we bear, endeavoring to use all the circumstances of life in their proper relations: what is the proper time for singing, what for play, and in what company; what will be the consequence of our performance; whether our companions will despise us, or we ourselves; when to employ raillery, and whom to ridicule; upon what occasions to comply, and with whom; and then, in complying, how to preserve our own character.

Wherever you deviate from any of these rules, the damage is immediate; not from anything external, but from the very action itself. "What, then; is it possible by these means to be faultless?" Impracticable; but this is possible, to use a constant endeavor to be faultless. For we shall have cause to be satisfied, if, by never remitting our care, we shall be exempt at least from a few faults. But now, when you say you will begin to take care to-morrow, be assured that it is the same thing as if you said, "Today I will be shameless, impertinent, base, it shall be in the power of others to grieve me; I will be passionate, I will be envious to-day." See to how many evils you give yourself up. "But all will be well tomorrow." How much better to-day? If it be for your interest to-morrow, how much more to-day, that it may be in your power to-morrow too, and that you may not again deter it until the third day. [2209]

Enchiridion of Epictetus

Tr. George Long Ed. R Cream

Section 17

Remember that thou art an actor in a play,¹ of such a kind as the teacher (author)² may choose; if short, of a short one; if long, of a long one: if he wishes you to act the part of a poor man, see that you act the part naturally; if the part of a lame man, of a magistrate, of a private person, (do the same). For this is your duty, to act well the part that is given to you; but to select the part, belongs to another.

Notes

1 Compare Antoninus, xi. 6, xii. 36.

2 Note, ed. Schweig.

Section 29¹

In every act observe the things which come first, and those which follow it; and so proceed to the act. If you do not, at first you will approach it with alacrity, without having thought of the things which will follow; but afterwards, when certain base (ugly) things have shewn themselves, you will be ashamed. A man wishes to conquer at the Olympic games. I also wish indeed, for it is a fine thing. But observe both the things which come first, and the things which follow; and then begin the act. You must do every thing according to rule, eat according to strict orders, abstain from delicacies, exercise yourself as you are bid at appointed times, in heat, in cold, you must not drink cold water, nor wine as you choose; in a word, you must deliver yourself up to the exercise master as you do to the physician, and then proceed to the contest. And sometimes you will strain the hand, put the ankle out of joint, swallow much dust, sometimes be flogged, and after all this be defeated.

When you have considered all this, if you still choose, go to the contest: if you do not, you will behave like children, who at one time play at wrestlers, another time as flute players, again as gladiators, then as trumpeters, then as tragic actors: so you also will be at one time an athlete, at another a gladiator, then a rhetorician, then a philosopher, but with your whole soul you will be nothing at all; but like an ape you imitate every thing that you see, and one thing after another pleases you. For you have not undertaken any thing with consideration, nor have you surveyed it well; but carelessly and with cold desire. Thus some who have seen a philosopher and having heard one speak, as Euphrates speaks,—and who can speak as he does?—they wish to be philosophers themselves also. My man, first of all consider what kind of thing it is: and then examine your own nature, if you are able to sustain the character. Do you wish to be a pentathlete or a wrestler? Look at your arms, your thighs, examine your loins. For different men are formed by nature for different things. Do you think that if you do these things, you can eat in the same manner, drink in the same manner, and in the same manner loathe certain things? You must pass sleepless nights, endure toil, go away from your kinsmen, be despised by a slave, in every thing have the inferior part, in honour, in office, in the courts of justice, in every little matter. Consider these things, if you would exchange for them, freedom from passions, liberty, tranquillity. If not, take care that, like little children, you be not now a philosopher, then a servant of the publicani, then a rhetorician, then a procurator (manager) for Caesar. These things are not consistent. You must be one man, either good or bad. You must either cultivate your own ruling faculty, for external things; you must either exercise your skill on internal things or on external things; that is you must either maintain the position of a philosopher or that of a common person.

Notes

1 ' Compare iii. 15, from which all this passage has been transferred to the Encheiridion by the copyists.' Upton. On which Schweighaeuser remarks, 'Why should we not say by Arrian, who composed the Encheiridion from the Discourses of Epictetus?' See the notes of Upton and Schweig. on some differences in the readings of the passage in iii. 15, and in this passage.