

We will begin from those things which for our instruction are primary. These are perspicuous and evident to all, and though they do not apprehend the power and essence of Virtue, yet according to common conceptions about Virtue they awaken our desire for good through certain aphorisms which are familiar to many and are expressed in accordance with the visible images of real beings. These are thus set forth:

(1) As we live through the soul, it must be said that by the virtue of this we live well; just as, since we see through the eyes, it is by virtue of these that we see well.

(2) It must not be thought that gold can be injured by rust, or virtue tainted by baseness.

(3) We should betake ourselves to virtue as to an inviolable temple, in order that we may not be exposed to any ignoble insolence of the irrational element of the soul.

(4) We should confide in virtue as in a chaste wife, but trust Fortune as we would a fickle mistress.

(5) It is better that virtue should be received with poverty, than wealth with vice; and frugality with health, than abundance with disease.

(6) As much food is injurious to the body, so is much wealth pernicious to the soul evilly inclined or disposed.

(7) It is equally dangerous to give a sword to a madman, and power to a depraved man.

(8) Just as it is better for a purulent part of the body to be burned than to remain diseased, so it is also better for a depraved man to die than to live.

(9) The theorems of Philosophy are to be enjoyed as much as possible, as if they were ambrosia and nectar; for the pleasure arising from them is genuine, incorruptible and divine. Magnanimity they are also able to produce, and though they cannot make us eternal beings, yet they enable us to obtain a scientific knowledge of eternal natures.

(10) If vigor of the senses is desirable, much more should prudence be sought; for it is as it were the sensitive vigor of our practical intellect. And as by the former we are protected from deception in sensations, so through the latter we avoid false reasoning in practical affairs.

(11) We shall worship the Deity rightly if we render our intellect pure from all vice, as from some kind of stain or disgrace.

(12) We should adorn a temple with gifts, but the soul with disciplines.

(13) As prior to the greater mysteries the lesser are delivered, so a disciplinary training must precede the study and acquisition of Philosophy.

(14) The fruits of the earth are indeed annually imparted, but the fruits of Philosophy at every season of the year.

(15) Just as land must be specially cultivated by him who wishes to obtain from it the best fruit, so the soul should be most carefully and attentively cultivated, in order that it may produce fruit worthy its nature.

If anyone should contribute additional aphoristic similitudes of this kind, drawn from things manifest to all, he will by a common reason arouse students to the study of Philosophy.

Stephen Neuville (Editor), Thomas Johnson: Iamblichus: The Exhortation to Philosophy: Including the Letters of Iamblichus & Proclus Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles; 1988