

An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by "Godfrey" of October 6, 2021 at 7:16 PM

[Quote from Philia](#)

It seems that one could do a hedonic calculus when making choices, but if the underlying assumption is that short-term physical pleasures are equally as important as long-term mental pleasures, then the long-term results will be a mixed bag (pleasure mixed with pain or pleasure resulting in pain), and/or one will find oneself on a never-ending hedonic treadmill.

So an Epicurean philosophy of life would be a life of guaranteed continuous pleasures ---- of a medium intensity (a nice well built fire to warm oneself together with one's friends) vs. a high intensity (too much fuel on the fire burns out too quickly). And this would be the difference between the Epicureans and the Cyrenaics.

I'm not sure that it's correct to have an underlying assumption that short-term physical pleasures are equally as important as long-term mental pleasures. To put words into Epicurus' mouth, I think that he would say that the most important thing is a correct understanding of his philosophy and that this would provide the pleasure of freedom from fear. Having achieved that, one can vary, embellish, and add icing to the cake through various other pleasures, both short- and long-term and of varying intensities.

Further, if the hedonic calculus is indeed subjective then the underlying assumption is different for each person: some preferring short-term physical pleasures and some preferring long-term mental pleasures, and of varying intensities. And preference would be different in time as well, varying over the course of an individual's life.

So I don't come to the conclusion that an Epicurean philosophy of life leads to continuous medium intensity pleasures, although the fire and friends example is quite pleasant! That conclusion, to me, is more like population based medicine which ignores the individual and averages out the entire population.

As to the Cyrenaics, I can't recall their overall philosophy at the moment, but I would consider that in comparing them with Epicurus (or anyone else). Epicurus has a very coherent overall philosophy, of which pleasure is a part, and the way that I understand that philosophy brings me great pleasure as being a fairly accurate representation of "the way things are". If the Cyrenaic philosophy as a whole made more sense to me then I would consider applying that to my life.