

Do Pigs Value Katastematic Pleasure? (Summer 2022 K / K Discussion)

Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2022 at 3:56 PM

You know there's another aspect of this discussion that's relevant to the presentation of Epicurean philosophy to "normal people" and we probably ought to consider it now too:

Quote

When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind. For it is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit. Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy: for from prudence are sprung all the other virtues, and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly, (nor, again, to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice) without living pleasantly. For the virtues are by nature bound up with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life is inseparable from them. For indeed who, think you, is a better man than he who holds reverent opinions concerning the gods, and is at all times free from fear of death, and has reasoned out the end ordained by nature? He understands that the limit of good things is easy to fulfill and easy to attain, whereas the course of ills is either short in time or slight in pain; he laughs at (destiny), whom some have introduced as the mistress of all things.

Does this mean that Epicurus has said (elsewhere) that he wouldn't know what the good is without the pleasures of sex and other activities which we'd all agree to be very "active" in nature, but that now that he knows what the good is he's going to throw them all out and live as "passively" and "quietly" as possible? That's the way I see this passage being interpreted all the time (again referring to the "modern commentator" world in general, not here).

To me, readings of that phrase that are consistent with the whole of the philosophy, and with the clear statement that he wouldn't know the good without active and indeed joy/delight/exuberant pleasures, is something like this:

"I've told you that "Pleasure" is the goal of life, but note that I have not told you which pleasures too pursue, and I have not told you that having sex 24/7 or having one drink after another 24/7 or partying 24/7 is the ultimate goal of life. If you do those things, any normal

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person in normal circumstances is going to destroy their lives and suffer much more pain that they will conclude is far worse than the pleasures they gained. What I am telling you is that the best you can do in life is to pursue pleasure prudently. Yes you should pursue the pleasures that allowed me to see what the good is, but pursue them in an intelligent (like I did) so that you don't run yourself into an early grave from all the partying. And when I say pursue those pleasures prudently, I don't mean abstain from them totally, or live in a cave, because the man who engages in too much frugality is making just as bad a mistake as the man who indulges in excess. You can always remember what the goal looks like by this mental exercise: "Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. What possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement."