

Thoughts and Discussion on Organizing Epicurean Community

Post by "Cassius" of September 18, 2022 at 7:21 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Now we can go a step further and apply a kind of heuristic which is that we will more quickly guess (or sense) whether or not we are causing pain to someone, and then be sure to avoid any behavior that might cause pain.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I just think that this ethical understanding needs to be clear. Any thoughts Cassius?

Yes I do have a thought. In general I think your formulation goes in the right direction, but "be sure to avoid any behavior which might cause pain" can probably be more accurately worded. That's because:

[Quote from Letter to Menoecus](#)

and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided.

It's a constant temptation to reduce the theory down to "pursue pleasure and avoid pain" but that's too simplistic. Yes it is true but mainly in the "ultimate outcome" rather than the immediate moment, and sometimes we will choose pain (for ourselves or for others) if prudence tells us that is the course most likely to maximize pleasure and minimize pain in the end.

And as a second point, I think we have to remember that we aren't just talking about maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain in the abstract, like there is some kind of flow of pleasure units and pain units in the universe as a whole. The pain and pleasure we are talking about is what we feel ourselves, which includes what we feel through our friends or anyone else we choose to empathize with, not the whole universe of living beings at large.

[Quote from Torquatus from Cicero's On Ends Book One](#)

Yet nevertheless some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition and love of power, lust, gluttony and those other desires, which ill-gotten gains can never diminish but rather must inflame the more; inasmuch that they appear proper subjects for restraint rather than for reformation.

Of course when we do inflict pain on someone to restrain them, we can expect them to react back against us, so we have to always consider whether we are prepared for that before we act.

So I think the larger point is that just like we have to be on guard and not pursue every choice that we think will lead to pleasure, we have to be on guard and not avoid every choice that we think will lead to pain. It's the ultimate outcomes that we are looking to steer by, and even when we say it like that, it is still a very subjective thing - there's no absolute way to measure feelings that applies to all situations.

That's the way it seems to me.