

New Christos Yapijakis Article: "The Philosophical Management of Stress"

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While Epicurus calls all sorts of actions or agreements 'beneficial' or 'harmful,' I'm inclined to agree with Godfrey and Cassius that Epicurus would hesitate to call pleasures as such harmful because he insists that all pleasures are in themselves good and that pain exhausts the category of harm. So saying a pleasure *is* harmful is a contradiction--like saying that pleasure is pain.

Now, you could technically run pleasure and harm together via causation--if some pleasures always produce more pain than pleasure, then you could perhaps say those pleasures *are* harmful because they produce harms of necessity. You might think that move makes the most sense in the case of vice because he says 'it is *impossible* to live pleasantly' if we are vicious. So someone might reasonably ask, why not just say 'vicious pleasure is harmful pleasure'? Or, *it is impossible* to be tranquil without studying science, so that relishing scientific ignorance is a harmful pleasure.

But I again think Godfrey is right that running them together muddies important distinctions best kept separate and tidy, like between instrumental and intrinsic goods. More importantly, Epicurus almost always writes in conditionals about particular actions (which is what makes his Greek so freaking frustrating!), so I'm not entirely convinced you could establish a firm causal link for specific pleasures anyway. So he'll say, 'if it were not the case that X, then we would not object,' or 'if it were true that X, then we would approve...'

Consider, for example, politics. There is a lot of pain in politics, and generally that pain does not produce sufficient pleasure to justify the pain. But Epicurus makes it clear that in some cases the benefits might justify the pain. So we don't want to say that politics is in most cases a harmful pain, but sometimes a beneficial pain. Better to just say that sometimes pain is worth it, and other times its not.