

What is the future of friendship? (Some random thoughts prompted by ChatGPT)

Post by "Cassius" of February 20, 2023 at 1:21 PM

I had time to come back and make another comment:

When I refer to the conflation of tranquility and pleasure as "one of the most dangerous" ideas I don't mean "dangerous" in the sense of evil or something malicious in and of itself. I mean dangerous in the hands of those who aren't thinking through the implications.

What I think I observe is that there is a great tendency in the non-Epicurean intellectual world to do everything possible to take the focus off of "pleasure." I don't think that is because such people dislike the experience of pleasure themselves, because of course they do. What they see - and what I think Epicurus saw - is that this question is a subtext for the deeper and more volatile question of "their" (again referring to non-Epicurean intellectuals) desire to maintain control of the narrative over others. If "they" can keep the focus on ideal forms, or essences, or virtue, or tranquility, or frankly *anything* other than pleasure itself, then "they" can define the narrative of how to live, and "they" can keep control over others who disagree with them.

I think Epicurus saw that, but I think it's always been a problem that people of good will are often slow to recognize that this tension exists. Some of them want to maintain the same power to define "the good" that Plato and similar wanted to keep for themselves, but some of them (especially in relatively good times) just don't find it in themselves to understand how important these questions are, and how "others" can use this issue to manipulate them. If someone doesn't have a manipulative personality then the desire to manipulate can be hard to understand. "I just want to be left alone to live my own life - doesn't everyone?" Unfortunately the answer to that is "No, everyone doesn't just want to be left alone."

We've noticed before that many of "us" tend to be introverts, and it's just not in our nature to want to spend our time scheming about ways to manipulate other people. That's very consistent with Epicurus' advise not to make a career in politics / control over others. But that is pretty much what "organized religion" is, whether it's in the form of the most super-primitive Christianity of the "west" or the most ultra-"enlightened" eastern viewpoints. I think that's one reason why those of us who only want to live our own lives find it appealing to pick and choose elements in other viewpoints that we think are desirable, while charitably glossing over or ignoring the negative elements in those viewpoints.

So of course that is not what I am thinking you are doing at all, but I do think that the overall massive tendency of the great majority of intellectuals in the last 2000 years has pushed in that direction. They think that if they can define the goal for other people as something other than the sense of pleasure and pain that Nature implanted in everyone then they have a leg up on

controlling the narrative and controlling society. And I think that technique does work, and it has been very successful for them, which is why they identify pleasure in general and Epicurus in particular as such an enemy.