

Tips On Offsetting Pleasures Against Pains

Post by "Cassius" of November 28, 2023 at 7:52 PM

Here's another way of looking at this too:

I strongly suspect that almost all of our regular posters here on this forum are approaching Epicurus in about the same common-sense way:

We are doing what we can to maximize pleasures of all kinds, and we are doing what we can to minimize pains of all kinds, and we're trying to go about it prudently including analyzing what we spend our time on and what we set as our goals. And we don't worry about life after death because we're convinced there is none. We don't worry about fearing or pleasing "gods" because either they don't exist at all, or they exist and look at us (if at all) like we look at ants, or some combination of the two. We don't really worry past a certain age that we haven't lived long enough, because we begin to see that it truly is just variation of what we've seen before, and as our bodies and minds naturally age we get more tired and less in need of newness in general.

I strongly suspect that the ancient Epicureans were doing the same thing.

The more academic and complicated definitions and arguments are useful for keeping our minds sharp and giving us confidence that we are on the right path -- that we don't have to doubt that what we're doing is all wrong from beginning to end.

So if we're all doing it about the same, as I think we are, what is the issue? I think "the issue" is that the way Epicurean philosophy has come to be viewed that you don't get from the starting point to where we are as easily as you should, because the standard interpretation of the letter to Menoeceus in particular has warped it into a manifesto of Stoic/Buddhist/Ascetic Minimalism. I think I can say that "we" aren't in danger of that kind of interpretation, anymore for a variety of reasons, but not everyone can take the time to read through all the discussions we have to find out that that "standard" interpretations are grossly oversimplified.

Over at Facebook (I don't think I mentioned this) someone recently posted that they wished that some "scholar" would go through and produce an easy-to-understand paraphrase of the [Principal Doctrines](#) and use it to print a pamphlet.

That has probably been done already, and there are many ways to do it, but the interesting thing to me is that as far as they go, it's not like the [Principal Doctrines](#) need to be "simplified." The language in them now is already direct. The issue is more that the Doctrines are presuming an Epicurean understanding of so many key terms and concepts, and without that background understanding the simple words are generally taken to mean something much different than intended. It's not "simplification" of wording that is needed, it's more "additional" wording that

explains the use of the terms.

Improving the roadway from the starting point of the Letter to Menoecus and the Principal Doctrine to where most of us are now through regular study and reading is what I think is so important. Because when these issues become second nature and fade into the background it becomes much easier to simply and practically focus on achieving a predominance of pleasures over pains.