

# Scientific Support for Psychological Hedonism

Post by "Cassius" of April 23, 2024 at 6:23 AM

I think I agree with everything there Don, and even the choice of words, with the possible exception of the very last word "content."

In describing what we would feel if we were running into a building to certain death to save our child, I don't know that I would describe it as "content" without more, but the meaning would be more like "confident that I had made the best choice among the agreeable (or less disagreeable) available alternatives." (With "best" defined not in terms of "virtue" or "duties" or "goodness" or "piety" or "holiness" or "logic" but in terms of the dominance of pleasure over pain that I would anticipate experiencing depending upon the choice I decide to take.)

In evaluating why I say that, I think my concern is the one I always have in evaluating flatly-stated terms like content / satisfied / calm / tranquil. I see those terms as overused in the philosophical world by people who are attitudinally more Buddhist or Stoic and who base their perspectives on acceptance of fate and passivity in the face of forces they feel unable to control or influence, or duty-bound to follow. I don't think that is an Epicurean attitude, and I see that attitude as destructive to identifying the attitude toward life that led to the success of the ancient Epicureans.

If I were Epicurus running into the burning building I would not use any of those words to describe the emotions I would be experiencing at the many aspects of the situation. Very likely I would be hot with anger I might have against the circumstances that placed all of us in that position of needing to run into the building, especially if those circumstances were caused maliciously or recklessly by someone who acted improperly. (In many cases the circumstances could be purely accidental or other factors would change the situation, but we should not ignore the real possibility that the situation was caused by malicious forces deserving of anger.)

I wouldn't be content or calm or satisfied or tranquil while I was running to certain death in those circumstances, but for the very reasons that you state, "find[ing] - even in their imagination - the prospect of not doing everything to protect their child unbearable" - I would be "confident that I had made the best choice among the agreeable (or less disagreeable) available alternatives." I can make peace with using "content" in that context as part of the overall picture ("I am content that I did the best I could to choose among the available alternatives"), but I think in the current intellectual environment it probably makes sense to be clear about the full meaning of "content."