

Being content in your situation or taking a risk for greater pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of May 21, 2024 at 1:24 PM

To expand on this: "You generally don't know how much more time you have to live, but one thing you know for certain is that once passed you never get that particular moment back again."

I don't have a suggested resolution to this, but to me this points the opposite way from nihilism, which strikes me as the worst enemy, at least for us today. I don't get the idea that the ancient Greeks or Romans were plagued by nihilism like we are today, so maybe that's an example that there really are changes in thought patterns over time, as in some recent discussions we're having. (Or maybe we can just chalk it up to that German word "Zeitgeist.")

If every moment you are alive you are focused on how short life is and how important it should be to you to make the most of your time, then you don't drift through life and inevitably run into the regret that you wish you had done more with your time.

That's pretty much why I have so little sympathy with a flat "me-oh-my-i-am-satisfied-with-what-i-have" approach.

Maybe you should be satisfied with your life, because you understand how the world works and you understand that variation, while it may be desirable, is not necessary in order to be able to say that you have experienced the "greatest" pleasure / "best life" possible.

But maybe you shouldn't be satisfied with your life if you've drifted from one false idea to another, exposing yourself to totally unnecessary pains and forgoing easily possible pleasures, and never really grasped what life is all about.

I think Epicurus' comments about satisfaction have to be taken in that context, such as:

VS68. Nothing is sufficient for him to whom what is sufficient seems too little.

That "*what is sufficient*" shouldn't be read to mean that "whatever you have is sufficient," but that it's important to think about what really is sufficient and target your plans for pleasure based on your circumstances. The same with:

VS35. We must not spoil the enjoyment of the blessings we have by pining for those we have not, but rather reflect that these too are among the things desirable.

That doesn't mean that you should be happy no matter what your current circumstances are, but that it's likely that during the ups and downs of life you have in fact achieved many things

that you always wanted but never thought possible.

But even that isn't a blanket endorsement of the status quo. Simply "being satisfied for the sake of being satisfied" sounds like an awfully Platonic or even Stoic reading of Epicurean philosophy to me. Feeling satisfied is certainly a type of pleasure, but it's far from the only type of pleasure. I would reject the idea that "satisfaction" is a complete and correct statement of the goal for the same reason I would reject "tranquility" as a complete and correct statement of the goal. Epicurus and his successors spent hundreds of years debating the precise way to articulate the goal, and it seems to me there's a very good reason that they settled on "pleasure" as the best single word statement, rather than on some more narrow subset of pleasure.