

The Axiology of Pain and Pleasure (are they intrinsic good/bad ?)

Post by “Don” of May 27, 2024 at 4:33 PM

Thank you for posting this! I read up to the point where a free subscription was needed, and I looked at the PDF of the academic paper.

Pigliucci is, of course, the Stoic's Stoic (in the modern sense). In light of that, I wouldn't expect him to be any more charitable to Epicurus than Epictetus was.

My take on the general direction of the article and the paper is that Epicurus addresses many (if not all) of their concerns. For example, the conclusion of the paper begins:

Quote

Consider how broad the scope of moral choice is which involves choosing between two good options, or choosing the lesser of two evils, or any consequentialist trade-offs between what is intrinsically good and bad. Now, consider how many of these choices are made while thinking that pleasures automatically count as good and pains automatically count as bad. *If we started denying the goodness of pleasure per se and the badness of pain per se, if we started thinking of these merely as (un)pleasant but without intrinsic value, the effects on our choices would be enormous. If we taught ourselves the proper functions of pain, if we cease to be fooled by the supposed “intrinsic disvalue” of it, so that we do not automatically think that experiencing pain is experiencing something bad, then we would not be fooled into avoiding pains which we know are not harmful by telling ourselves that the pain itself justifies us in avoiding it.*

I'm intentionally highlighting that last section because I feel that is precisely Epicurus's position.

Pigliucci makes the error in his article about Epicurus's "freedom from pain" into an all or nothing proposition:

Quote

Epicureanism still counts as a hedonistic school, though, in part because Epicurus identified lack of pain as the highest possible pleasure.

And, yes, Epicurus did... But not for the reasons you appear to be making, Massimo. We've had extensive and on-going discussions on this forum about what that "highest pleasure = absence of pain" means, and I think we're going in the right direction. It's easy to caricature; more difficult to understand.

So, in the end , my reaction is that both the article and the paper rehash old arguments in "new wineskins" so to speak. I'll be interested to read others' takes.