

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

Post by “Don” of June 1, 2024 at 11:14 PM

I appreciate the additional information and perspective, [Onenski](#) ! I have some reactions:

[Quote from Onenski](#)

think about this exaggerated example. Imagine that, in a community, people believe that men should work and women should stay at home. They might say: "for generations things have been like this, it's the natural order, it must be like this". Philosophers say that this reasoning is wrong, because they are inferring a normative proposition from factual propositions. They're inferring an ought from an is.

From that example, my reaction is that that is a culturally-dependent example, not a "naturally occurring" one. The "fact" is merely built on cultural and societal norms. The feeling of pleasure - or the aversion to pain and the attraction to positive stimuli - is biological.

[Quote from Onenski](#)

The basic idea is that in a naturalistic ethical project (like the Epicurean one, for example), holding that pleasure (or any other natural entity) is good, implies that there's something in pleasure that makes it good. The question is, which property is that and why pleasure has it?

I still think the idea of "good/bad" - although Epicurus clearly uses good (agathos) and bad (kakos) - is a function of the language we have available to us. "Good" can mean "morally/ethical 'good'" but to I still maintain that it is built on a fundamental meaning of positive feeling. Pleasure - according to Epicurus - is fundamentally agathos, by pleasure's nature. If we take agathos at its most basic meaning, it is something that is useful for a purpose, and from that springs all other meanings. I'm not a big fan of extrapolating from etymologies, but in this case, I'll make an exception. Pleasure is generally useful in one's life to steer toward something positive. Can pleasure's usefulness be short-circuited? Of course. An easy example is drinking too much alcohol, although some alcohol seems to have societal and personal benefits ([Check out this episode of The Next Big Idea](#)). Extrapolating this to a "moral" or "ethical" "good" isn't necessarily necessary.

[Quote from Onenski](#)

As you may see, this approach looks suspicious, because is taking the naturalistic Epicurean theory in a kind of platonic terms



Exactly, and well put! It seems like they're saying, "We're not going to play by your rules. We reject your rules, and replace them with our own!" ... sigh...