

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

Post by "Don" of June 4, 2024 at 7:49 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Would that not be better worded with some kind of caveat that "we need to be cautious in making choices based on evolutionary considerations..." rather than "we don't..." because:

- in fact many people often "do" make choices that way, even though it "may" be shortsighted.... and

I'm not sure I necessarily agree that that's better wording; however, I may not be conveying what I'm trying to convey. What I'm trying to convey is that humans don't make decisions based on "evolutionary" considerations. Humans make decisions based primarily on self-interest, or perceived self-interest, what they feel will lead to pleasure for them. That's the root of psychological hedonism as I understand it. People may use "evolution made me do it" as a rationalization or justification post facto. But I doubt anyone is making a decision solely for by saying "My evolution dictates that I do this thing." People make decisions on the spur of the moment all the time based on instinct and fight/flight responses ingrained by biological evolution. So, in that sense, they "do" make choices that way, and, yes, these "may" be shortsighted... but that's saying - it seems to me - that they were necessitated or were inevitable, when Epicurus states clearly that decisions should be made using practical wisdom and not solely on ingrained, biological urges or proclivities.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

- in an Epicurean perspective without fate or necessity or a providential god force, "sometimes" a decision to go against the generally-observable rule (I gather we all agree that the general rule is to the effect that blindly following evolution in every case is generally a bad idea) will in fact work out and be the proper choice in some circumstances?

I added emphasis on your word "choice". It's not a "choice." In fact, it seems to me to be the opposite of a choice if one is "blindly following." And, yes, sometimes things work out by dumb luck, but, according to Epicurus, "it is better to be unfortunate rationally than fortunate irrationally."

And, yes, we've gone round and round on [PD10](#) in the past. To state my position, I think [PD10](#) is cautionary. To review:

If the things that produce the delights of those who are decadent washed away the mind's fears about astronomical phenomena and death and suffering, and furthermore if they taught us the limits of our pains and desires, then we would have no complaints against them, since they would be filled with every joy and would contain not a single pain or distress (and that's what is bad). (Saint-Andre translation)

I see this as cautionary and not necessarily proscriptive. Sure, you can engage in the delights of the decadent, but it's not going to "wash away the mind's fears" IF it did, we'd have no problem with it... but *it doesn't*. I'm also looking at the verb tenses here in Greek. That's one reason for my conclusion, but also just the general tenor of the statement and what he says in the Letter to Menoikeus.

I'll assume I've cleared up nothing and merely muddied the waters with this reply 😊