

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

Post by "Cassius" of June 4, 2024 at 9:14 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Someone may say they're doing it because of "duty" but my contention will continue to be that they're doing because it feels good to say "I did my duty."

Yes your contention will remain that, and the professor of psychological hedonism can say that to his patient all day long as a means of diagnosing that person's psychology. And in turn the person who is being accused of being a "psychological hedonist," but who in fact sees himself as a person of strong religious or humanist belief, can deny that label all day long.

In the meantime, in the real world of people who want to think about options as to how they can change their beliefs and thought processes in order to live better, rather than just talk past each other, it is useful first and foremost make this basic conceptual / philosophical point:

1. Duty is not inherently pleasurable.
2. Piety is not inherently pleasurable.
3. Virtue is not inherently pleasurable.
4. Only pleasure is inherently pleasurable.

Then afterwards if a professor wants to discuss a clinical diagnosis of erroneous behavior, for example as to why a person might consider himself to be devoted to "duty," then terms like "psychological hedonism" will allow that professor to write cool articles for "Psychology Today."

But for ordinary people who just want plain talk about how to live better, the approach found in pages of "Psychology Today" are not the first place to start. The writers in Psychology Today will talk themselves in circles about different ways to diagnose conditions, without ever taking a firm position on what "mental health" actually looks like.

The place to start is for example the letter to Menoecus: "[129] And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good."



Clarification: I am not criticizing your particular use of the term, Don, or saying that you are talking past anyone. I have this same problem whenever the term "psychological hedonism" comes up in any context. It seems to me that applying the term "psychological hedonism" rarely if ever leads to anything useful. For much the same reason I really don't like the term "hedonism" either. It conveys all the wrong implications in modern usage that even the word "pleasure" does not have, so I personally never like to talk about Epicurean philosophy as "hedonism" or "hedonist." I understand the technical labels in a technical context but I find them very harmful in regular usage. Adding "psychological" to "hedonism" to me just adds a "deterministic" overlay that, from an Epicurean point of view, just digs the hole deeper. 😊