

A Fable on Unattainable Expectations

Post by “Patrikios” of October 20, 2024 at 4:01 PM

[Quote from SillyApe](#)

This is the kind of thinking that first made me love Epicurean Philosophy. In the past, I was full of these vain desires and expectations, which brought me so much pain. One day, I read about Epicurus encouraging his followers to analyze their desires and do the calculation to see if they are worth it or not. Once I realized the futility of my pursuits and let these desires and expectations go, I felt so much light, as if I were a locked bird, now free to fly to the skies. Later on, I discovered the concept of "cognitive load", which explained through Psychiatry what Epicurus taught many centuries ago through Philosophy.

SI,

Thanks for your description of the feelings (sensations) you experienced when applying some of Epicurus's writings to analyze desires. When I think of Epicurus concept of living prudently, I try to do the right analysis of pleasure vs. pain to determine how much effort, resources, pain to expend to achieve what expected benefits that make life more pleasant. I have found this Epicurean analysis is helped when we better understand how to use our natural biology to ‘program’ our minds to apply the principles more naturally.

Recently I have been reading papers by **Christos Yapijakis**. He adds a medical perspective that shows how what Epicurus advocated is supported by our modern understanding of human biology & psychology. Through the Epicurean practice, the right thinking that leads to tranquility also helps the body operate in harmony as our bodies are intended to operate. This leads to the desired state of whole body & mind & spirit in balance - a state of **homeostasis**. This natural state of our body at ‘ease’ helps reduce dis-ease, which reduces body pains.

Here is an example of how Yapijakis describes the biological process (with my **bolded** emphasis).

“This tripartite neurophysiological functioning of the brain is greatly reminiscent of Epicurus’ teachings. The Athenian philosopher emphasized the fact that the basic needs of human nature lay on our instincts (“reptilian brain”), which correspond to **natural and necessary desires** and should be satisfied or else our bodies will suffer: «Σαρκὸς φωνὴ τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥιγοῦν» (“The cry of the flesh: not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold”)12. Moreover, Epicurus recognized the critical importance of the positive emotion of pleasure and it

seems that he almost described the selective role of the amygdala when he said: «Τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν. Ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς» (“We say that **pleasure is the starting point** and **goal of living blessedly**. For we recognized this as our first innate good, and **this is our starting point for every choice and avoidance**”)¹³. He determined the purpose of human life on emotional grounds (“mammalian brain”) aiming at the **blissful state of physical** ἀπονία (lack of pain) and mental ἀταραξία (calmness, lack of agitation). Above all, Epicurus considered **prudence** (“primate brain”) as the supreme regulator of conscious selection of what brings happiness, with wise satisfaction of physical needs and preservation of emotional balance by tasting those pleasures that do not result in greater pain instead of pleasure¹⁴. With great foresight, the philosopher realized that prudence should govern, because this is the ultimate nature of humans as primates, without forgetting feelings which also play a major role in their life, since humans are mammals, too.”

Epicurean Biological Psychology

Christos Yapijakis

D.M.D.,M.S.,Ph.D. (cyapijakis_ua_gr@yahoo.com)

1 Department of Neurology, School of Medicine, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

2 “Garden of Athens”, Friends of Epicurean Philosophy

23th WORLD CONGRESS OF PHILOSOPHY, ATHENS 2013