Why Minimizing All Desire Is Incorrect (And What To Do Instead)

Post by “Don” of December 6, 2024 at 8:20 AM

That's not quite the Buddhist perspective. I think it's important if we're going to argue against their position (and I am more than fine with that, to be clear!), it should be clear what we're arguing against.

The first Noble Truth (NT) is usually translated "Life is suffering" but that's almost as misleading as just saying "pleasure is the good." The word translated suffering is dukkha.

The Pali Text Society's Pali-English dictionary

So, a better paraphrase of NT1 is "Life as most everyone lives it is unsatisfactory, filled with misery, pain, unfulfilled desire, etc." It's not wrong, life can be painful. But it tries to catch all things wrong with *how* people live in one word. That sounds familiar to the Epicureans problem with conveying the meaning of pleasure.

> Quote from Cassius
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> Buddhist team isn't satisfied with attacking pleasure, they want to attack life itself in the form of the desire to remain living. So they narrow the definition of desire so as to focus only on the desires that are most intoxicating and in many cases impossible, and that allows them to disparage *all* desire and make arguments that imply that the term "desire" consists only of those desires that frequently lead to disastrous results.

Again, NT2 addresses why life is suffering: thirst, desire, craving. We want things to go a certain way, and when we don't get that, it's painful. The word is tanha. They don't go after "desires that are most intoxicating and in many cases impossible," they go after ALL desires. Anything that we thirst for or desire or crave, if we don't get it, that brings suffering. They say all desire, all craving, results in dukkha. Tanha is analogous in its comprehensive nature to pleasure for Epicureans. NOT philosophically!! Just semantically, tanha does a lot of heavy lifting, like the word hēdonē does for our school.

I'm not going to turn this into a Buddhist apologetic, but I think it's important to get details right when we're arguing against other schools - and we should argue! Just don't want to strawman any of them.