

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

Post by "Cassius" of December 7, 2024 at 9:34 AM

It is unfortunate that we have to choose only one responsive icon, because I wanted to use both the like and the smile face. Limited to only one choice, I chose the like!

As usual I think we are in almost total agreement, with the only possible exception being:

[Quote from Don](#)

I *think* it has to be number two since Epicurus includes all activities that bring pleasure as defined as good.

You mean there is doubt in your mind about that? 😏

Smiling aside I do have something additional to contribute that this gives me the opportunity to say.

I focused several comments on the use of "hypothetical" constructs, but that may not be the primary issue that's going on (not between our two interpretations, but something that's causing widespread issues).

Rather than the issue being use of hypotheticals, maybe the word is the issue of the *literalism* that Epicurus seems to me to be using. (Mostly option one of the following definition.)

Quote

literalism [lit-er-uh-liz-uhm] **noun**

1. adherence to the exact letter or the [literal](#) sense, as in translation or interpretation:

to interpret the law with uncompromising literalism.

2. a peculiarity of expression resulting from this:

The work is studded with these obtuse literalisms.

3. exact representation or portrayal, without idealization, as in art or literature:

a literalism more appropriate to journalism than to the novel.

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For example when he says things like "by pleasure we mean the absence of pain" or "[death is nothing to us](#)" or "The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once."

I think he means those statements to be taken absolutely literary, and not in any way metaphorically or allegorically or in any way that would undercut the takeaway that he means what he says and says what he means.

He's literally defining pleasure as absence of pain, which means pain is absence of pleasure, and the two options are to be taken as literally the same, at the very least for the purpose of logical analysis.

Joshua's been regularly suggesting that the statement about believing gods to be living beings blessed and imperishable is meant to be "definitional" about a god, and I think he's right, meaning that we should take Epicurus literally at his word. We can interpolate the implications of the statement all day, but the beginning of the analysis is that we should take him to be speaking very precisely.

That may be a better way of getting at the way [PD10](#) and many other statements are worded. It's reasonable to take them as hypotheticals and think through the implications to come to practical applications, but at the same time they are intended to be taken *literally*. It's the literalness that gives them their clarity and logical order, and allows you to judge exactly what is consistent and inconsistent with them.

Yes, literally, Epicurus seems clearly to me to be affirming as an absolute that yes, all pleasures are desirable, because they feel pleasurable, but at the same time, and without violating that first phrase, not all pleasures are to be chosen, because choosing them will frequently bring more pain than pleasure when all consequences are considered.

It's literally true at one and the same time that all pleasures are pleasing, yet not all pleasures are to be chosen, because -- considering all consequences -- the pain that generally follows will outweigh the pleasure.

BUT - and this is a big point - the reason it's not proper to go further and say that choosing them will DEFINITELY bring more pain than pleasure is that there is no force of determinism in the universe that guarantees that result. Generally, even an overwhelming number of times, the result is predictable, but it's not always predictable, because there is no force of necessity which requires it to be so. When Epicurus wouldn't even admit it to be necessary that Metrodorus will necessarily be alive or dead tomorrow, he's not going to admit it to be

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necessary that any particular choice will necessarily lead to a precise result in terms of net pleasure or pain.