

Discussion of Article: "Political Division In The Promotion of Epicurean Philosophy: A Prescription For Disaster"

Post by "Cassius" of September 29, 2019 at 9:35 AM

I completely agree with what Elayne wrote and wish to stress this: " Our own pleasure is closely bound up in the pleasure of our friends -- and this is not a "should" situation, just an observation."

The point I am emphasizing is that Epicurean philosophy has no "should" rules other than what we perceive ourselves through pleasure and pain. Elayne has used the example of volunteering in trail maintenance, and how she experienced direct pleasure in her own actions, as well as mental pleasure from knowing that her actions would be of benefit to other hikers like herself.

This is an example of how Epicurus considered the effect of **all** types of pleasure, both physical and mental, in his philosophy. He stated that mental pleasures **can be** (but are not necessarily) stronger than physical pleasures. But he gave no ideal formula by which every person must (or should) add up those pleasures in his or her own experience. That is up to us to do, and it cannot be done by an outsider who does not have our own bundle of likes and dislikes and genetic and cultural and educational history. We can **force** such calculations on others, which is what is done by "the greatest good of the greatest number" but we can never really know that our forced calculation is what each individual would choose for him or herself. In fact, what we know is the opposite - that generalization will never fit the reality of the individuals.

These observations are very unsettling for many people. They presume due to their training in religion or in secular humanism that everyone is or should be basically alike, and that they see things the same way we do. Not to endorse or to criticize it, but such a viewpoint is rolled up into politicians who, for example, wish to "export democracy" or "make the world safe for democracy" and to compel everyone to share their own view of government, whether it be Marxist or capitalist or socialist or libertarian or whatever.

Such "universalist" or "utilitarian" or "one size fits all" viewpoints go far enough to realize that pleasure comes in many forms, both mental and physical, and that abstractions can be very pleasurable to contemplate. But those viewpoints dismiss the truth that different people calculate their abstractions in different ways, and that there is no "higher" justification that any abstraction "should" carry any greater weight than any other. There is only what "is" in the lives of real people. We can wipe out our political enemies in the millions with firebombs and nuclear weapons, and then bask in the glory that everyone who is left shares our views, but after such as war there is not a bit more "justification" for our having taken those actions than we had

before the war started. There is no God or ideal perfect standard by which we can say that our actions were justified by a higher good. Those actions may or may not lead to our greater pleasure or pain than if we had not taken them, but that standard (pleasure and pain) is the only standard given by Nature for such decisions.

If you read the last ten of the doctrines of Epicurus, which focus on the fact that there is no such thing as "absolute justice," you will see that Epicurus was fearless in following the observations of his physics and epistemology to their logical ethical conclusions.