

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2020 at 6:59 AM

1 - Thank you Godfrey!

2 - "Cyrenaics were radical hedonists, taking the pleasure of the moment to be more important than the pleasantest life."

I know this is the standard interpretation, and I have no textual evidence to dispute it, but this has always struck me as being something to be cautious about. On its face it seems so short-sighted that I can't imagine an intelligent person advocating it as it superficially appears. It's almost as if - even if this formulation is accurate - they must have had some other additional doctrine that explains why this formulation doesn't really mean exactly what it seems to us. Also, given the opposition that Epicurus encountered even during his own time, one would think that these guys must have encountered the same opposition (or worse) and perhaps we are missing their replies. Add to the what we see in our own time about the pressures to conform to majority viewpoints, and the absolute intensity of force of those who want to beat down any suggestion that "pleasure" can legitimately be

But I say all that not having studied the topic extensively, plus realizing that the texts are probably mostly lost.

Maybe it would be useful to think about how Epicurus might make a point himself that could seem similar. For example:

Maybe even the concept of a "pleasant life" is so much of an abstraction as to be misleading to talk about as a single concept, just like it can be hazardous to talk about a single "greatest good?" Doesn't the letter to Menoeceus itself state that we choose the life not that is longest, but which is most pleasant, so is it not hazardous to consider time to be a controlling element?

Maybe they were arguing that all we really have is "now" so we must include in the "now" all our calculations about the future?

There's no doubt in my mind that Epicurus improved on Cyreniac doctrine, but there's a lot of doubt in my mind about really how bad or inadequate thinkers they were.