

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2020 at 8:55 AM

Those are great points and questions Don.

You know what explains and motivates some of my most recent thinking, and these comments?

I always seem to come back in my mind to the concern that I think Epicurus intended his philosophy for pretty much EVERYONE who has any brainpower whatsoever. I think it's inherent in the "outline" model that he referred to explicitly that we ought to concentrate most of our time and effort on the "big picture" items that are the most significant to us as real people living real lives, and that we aren't just "academics" pursuing knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

That means that I think it's kind of a trap - a type that Cicero and other anti-Epicurean philosophers intentionally laid and set - for us to be so fascinated by the details that we fail to accept and apply the immediate issues of most profound significance. I enjoy it as much as anybody else, but so long as we act like we are college students in an advanced philosophy class, the human world spins by outside the windows in total unawareness or even hostility toward what we are discussing inside. And we miss the experiences and the accomplishments that we ought to achieve were we fully engaged in the world.

Maybe I think that this is one of the real purposes of the academic viewpoint that wisdom or scholarship itself is the highest kind of life. Maybe I think that we're in a matrix of the sort that Marx accused religion of being - the "opiate of the people." Maybe the endless debates over word structures and points that are of less significance, and which are almost impossible to resolve, is the "opiate of the educated" which keeps US in our box and away from full engagement with the world.

So I always come back in the end to the idea that we should be asking "what are the most important points?" and "how do we convey these to other people who should be our friends?" and "how do we therefore begin again what the ancient Epicureans were in the process of doing before their world was overwhelmed with totalitarian monotheist religion?"

I think that discussing and debating the details that we are doing now is a critical part of the process, so we can in fact understand how to describe the major outline. But unless we find the time and the energy and the organization to do both at the same time, we're still trapped in that Platonic cave because we're not translating our findings into action. It's as if we are so mesmerized by "knowledge" or "science" - which are themselves "unlimited" and can never be fully achieved in a human lifetime, that we forget the fundamental point that we have to use our limited lifespans as productively as possible.

I suspect both the ancient Epicureans and the Cyreniacs would agree on that point, and that they would tell us something like:

"Look at the world around you! PUT ASIDE the details such as whether memories are pleasant for the time being. Your life is short, you are surrounded by people who are actively working to suppress you and your friends and your views of the universe and the true end of life. How do you expect to live pleasantly if you don't accept that reality and form a plan to deal with it? Just don't sit around thinking and debating about details - ACT on the main points -- like we did!"