

Is [X] a waste of time?

Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2020 at 8:56 AM

Yes I agree Don, and we're totally together. I think that OUGHT to be a relatively non-controversial point, but it's definitely worth making.

The other point is the controversial one. I just saw this below cross my email and I see it as another example of the problem:

The Normativity of Nature in Epicurean Ethics and Politics
Tim O'Keefe, Georgia State University

[Preliminary draft. Final version is forthcoming in *Stoa and Seneca: Essays in Ancient Political Philosophy*, eds. by Peter Adamson and Christof Rapp, De Gruyter. Please cite that version once it is published.]

Appeals to nature are ubiquitous in Epicurean ethics and politics. The foundation of Epicurean ethics is its claim that pleasure is the sole intrinsic good and pain the sole intrinsic evil, and this is supposedly shown by the behavior of infants who have not yet been corrupted, "when nature's judgement is pure and whole." Central to their recommendations about how to attain pleasure is their division between types of desires, so that we know which desires we should seek to satisfy and which ones to reject: the natural and necessary ones, the natural but non-necessary ones, and the vain and empty ones. Elsewhere, the Epicureans talk about the "natural goods" of political power and fame, and they contrast "natural wealth" with wealth as "defined by empty opinion." Finally, in their politics, Epicurus claims that the "the justice of nature is a pledge of reciprocal usefulness, [i.e.] neither to harm one another nor to be harmed."

Written this way, Okeefe is implying that Epicurus taught we should prioritize and even go exclusively for the "natural and necessary pleasures." I totally reject that interpretation with more energy every time I confront it 😊

The use of the categories is for ANALYSIS of the likelihood that a potential choice of action is going to come at a price of higher or lesser pain. BUT THAT ALONE DOES NOT TELL US WHETHER TO CHOOSE THAT COURSE OF ACTION OR NOT!

WE have to decide, based on our own view of obtaining the most pleasure at a cost in pain we agree to be worthwhile, what course to choose. We WILL sometimes choose pain, or avoid current pleasure, in order to achieve greater pleasure as the result.

If we don't make that EMPHATICALLY CLEAR then Okeefe's formulation is a prescription for disaster -- the equivalent of pilot nosediving his plan into the ground for the sake of making sure that his total net future pain is the least possible.

Every time I think about this stuff the angrier I get -- not, of course, at anyone here, but at these professional commentators. They have turned the modern understanding of Epicurus into Stoicism, or frankly, even worse than Stoicism, because the Stoics at least seem to think that virtue is a worthwhile goal. Painlessness for the sake of painlessness is just pure abject

cowardice and its degeneracy is difficult to overstate.