

Catherine Wilson's January 2021 article: "Why Epicureanism, Not Stoicism, Is The Philosophy We Need Now"

Post by "Elayne" of January 13, 2021 at 2:05 PM

Ack. I think the article is pretty bad.

She says the application of rationality must itself be enjoyable or no reason to do it-- untrue. If studying boring material for a test leads to passing a class and gaining access to a more interesting class, I would (and have) done it. That's basic EP, sometimes choosing a pain for greater pleasure.

Self control reducing pain to others and the self? Basic misunderstanding that pain to others is painful to us (most of us), so it should not be listed separately. If we didn't care about them and there were no consequences from them, they wouldn't enter into consideration. It's empathy that causes us innate inclusion of their pleasure.

She lists associations of consumerism without clearly linking those to the reader's pains. Lot of assuming there.

Did Epicurus have security for "all" as a goal? I don't see that.

We've discussed the bliss pill a lot. She's wrong that the person wouldn't be in reality-- the pill is real, so the effects and pleasure experiences are real. The problems we've identified are that hypotheticals don't contain real world details. If it really were continual pleasure, complete pleasure, there would be nothing missing. If it was boring or somehow unsatisfactory it wouldn't be bliss as advertised. If it felt unreal in an unpleasant way, it wouldn't be bliss. The flaws in her argument aren't a logical failure just a failure to remember pleasure is an actual feeling. She is substituting a reasoning process for the feeling.

Most wouldn't take it bc in real life, we use pain as a warning of tissue damage, and this pill might severely shorten our lives if we had no way to know our appendix was rupturing, etc. It would require not just a bliss pill but total safety from all life-shortening harm that we would lose our ability to notice. Most of us also wouldn't necessarily trust such a medication without extensive testing. If we had a way to stop all harm and threat of harm, then we wouldn't need the bliss pill anyway ☐.

Although we can't increase the height of pleasure past the limit of removal of pain, most people do want to extend the area under the curve, longevity-- we want to continue our pleasure. So this bliss pill would be a risky move.

I don't find this a justification for chains of logic. Instead, although there are some pragmatic issues, mainly she seems to forget pleasure is a feeling.

On the political side, she has confused EP with social utilitarianism. Not the same. In EP we would expect to see people trying to max their pleasure, including their vicarious pleasure at that of others, probably by a negotiation process, making justice contracts.