

The Nature of Work

Post by "Don" of February 20, 2021 at 9:42 AM

Happy Twentieth! Welcome to your first post!

[isychos](#) , you bring up one of the most important topics possible: How do we apply Epicurean philosophy in our lives? As Epicurus said:

Quote

A philosopher's words are empty if they do not heal the suffering of mankind. For just as medicine is useless if it does not remove sickness from the body, so philosophy is useless if it does not remove suffering from the soul.

So, enough prologue! Here are my thoughts...

It pains me to hear you describe your work this way. I agree with your seeing "grin and bear it" as a Stoic assessment as it applies to work. However, seeing it as a means to an end has potential. Work is instrumental in some ways - like virtues - but it can provide pleasure itself. Epicurus requires us to assess each of our choices and rejections in light of pleasure and pain.* Everything* we do is a choice. I make a choice every day to get out of bed and go to work. Could I choose not to go to work? Sure! I could choose to quit my job. I could choose to call in sick. But would each of these lead to more pleasure or pain. If I'm sick, I probably should choose not to go to work (IF this choice is available - but that's another conversation). If I choose to quit my job and have no money coming in, would that lead to more pleasure or pain. In the long run, for myself (not being able to leave civilization and live in the woods living off the land), that would lead to more pain.

I see Epicureanism as a philosophy of personal responsibility. I can't blame my lot on the gods and pray my way out. I can't blame my lot on fate and "grin and bear it." Where I'm at is a result of the choices and rejections I've made, and I'll change my lot by changing my choices based on sound reasoning (phronesis) based on my reactions of pleasure and pain based on information from my senses.

Epicurus also said:

Quote

Don't ruin the things you have by wanting what you don't have, but realize that they too are things you once did wish for.

I would assume that the job you have now was something you sought out at one time. Why? Why did your present job appear desirable at one time? Just the money? Just escape from a worse job (which at one point was also sought out)? Please don't feel that you have to reply to my questions! I just want you to think about this yourself. I'm not saying you have to just accept your job. If the work is unbearable and/or dangerous, do your best to find different work. But Epicurus, it seems to me, says nothing in our day-to-day world is purely good or purely bad. At the end of your day, look back over it. Was there at least one moment of pleasure? Was there one moment of gratitude? If you can't leave your present job, your friends may be right in that this one is a means to an end. But you have to decide what that end is. You give meaning to your work. It's not imposed from outside.

Let me say that I know none of this is easy. Being stuck in a job "just for the money" is HARD! I've been there, slogging away day in, day out. But you have the power to change your perspective based on sound philosophy.

I hope this conversation is the beginning of something helpful for you. I'll end for now with Epicurus's greetings he supposedly used in many of his letters:

Quote

Εὖ πράττειν καὶ Σπουδαίως ζῆν

"May you practice well and may your life be lived with purpose!"