

Epicurean philosophy vs. Stoicism in public popularity

Post by “Don” of March 18, 2021 at 11:28 PM

It sounds to me like [Elayne](#) is embodying KD5:

Quote

KD5: It is not possible to live a pleasurable life without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice; and it is impossible to live with wisdom, morality, and justice without living pleurably. When one of these is lacking, it is impossible to live a pleasurable life.

Virtues like empathy, compassion, altruism are not ends unto themselves but are traits that can spring from our desire for -- and can lead to -- our personal experience of pleasure. We don't practice virtues (however that's defined) because it's the "right" thing to do; we practice virtues because it leads to a pleasurable life.

As I understand [Elayne](#) 's post (please correct me if I'm misinterpreting):

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Well... I do exactly plan on doing as I please, with no qualifiers! It's just that what I please involves taking pleasure in the pleasure of others, not that I'm trying to avoid causing trouble or disrupting my schedule for reasons unrelated to pleasure.

It actually seems you are in fact adding qualifiers right away:

I do exactly plan on doing as I please which involves taking pleasure in the pleasure of others.

Which seems to uphold the tenets of KD5. [Elayne](#) is not going to purposefully cause pain to others because she takes pleasure in the pleasure of others.

Likewise, if we value our own pleasure, the most intelligent choice is to be kind to others since that engenders goodwill, creates bonds of friendship and love (among colleagues, partners, family members, etc.), and so increases the likelihood that our personal pleasure is more secure. This use of intelligent choice seems to me to be acting virtuously. [Elayne](#) even says:

Quote

[Person B] should want me to be selfish for their own sake!

This seems to be similar to what the psychologists, Buddhists, et al. call "selfish altruism" or "intelligent selfishness":

- <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/m...lating-kindness>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-con...shness-altruism>
- <https://www.skepticspath.org/blog/how-to-be...ish-dalai-lama/>

Which leads me to ask: What if someone does what the average person would call selfish "morally reprehensible" actions but derives personal pleasure from them?

I'll fully agree that Epicurus's philosophy does not endorse Platonic ideals. There is no "ideal" form of beauty, chairs, Truth, etc. The philosophy clearly states that there is no absolute god-given moral authority, it's based on societal agreements and "don't harm; don't be harmed." Plus he wrote "all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good [good, blessing, benefit, useful to us], not all pleasure is choiceworthy."

He doesn't say it's right, morally or ethically good, just basically that all pleasure is "positive" but just because it's positive doesn't make it choice-worthy. And pain is not always to be fled from. In fact, the pleasure "choice" and pain "shunned" use the same roots that Epicurus consistently uses where "choice" and "avoidances" show up in translations.

Epicurus clearly tried to break sharply away from "virtue for virtue's sake." Virtue, he taught, was instrumental to pleasure and thus to leading a pleasurable life. So, it seems to me that Epicureans are still going to act virtuously to the outside observer. The inner motivation is going to be far different than the Stoic or Aristotelian, but the visible form/action is going to be similar.

I get the impression from time to time that some people want to say there's no absolute moral authority to define morality in Epicurean philosophy, so anything goes as long as the person is experiencing Pleasure in the moment.

I don't accept this. A pleasurable life is the goal. Epicurus says that's only possible if you act virtuously; and vice versa: if you act virtuously, you'll have a better chance of living pleurably.

People who take pleasure in what the average human would find morally or ethically repugnant aren't living according to Epicurean principles and so we would have reason to intervene and attempt to get them to change. Just because they are feeling pleasure doesn't make their life choice-worthy. I wrestle with this, but the more I think about it, the more I'm coming to these conclusions.