

Talking About Epicurus With Someone Who Is A Stoic (Or Of Some Other Anti-Epicurean Philosophy)

Post by "Cassius" of January 8, 2022 at 6:48 AM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

E.g., I believe that every person has basic human right- if I stopped believing in that, that would mean that I can't judge Nazism as a terrible political ideal. And that would lead to some terrible conclusions.

Of course i am going to challenge you (EPICURUS is going to challenge you) on exactly that point. Not that you should not judge Nazism (or Communism or Maoism or any other ism that you judge awful) to be awful, but that you must judge it with absolute clarity that it is YOU, and people like you, who find it awful -- not that there is a supernatural god, or a Platonic realm of ideas or even a "basic human right" -- because those things, even "basic human right" are not established by Nature and are not vindicated by Nature. Unless YOU and people like you take action to express your reaction against the views that you find repulsive, then those views can and will triumph. And THAT is what leads to terrible results -- when people start thinking that supernatural gods, or supernatural realms of ideas, will do their own work for them.

I realize how challenging this is -- Don in particular will agree with us how challenging this is, but I think it is the only logical conclusion to reach when you apply Epicurus consistently. That's where Godfrey's statement comes in:

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

t IS scary! Especially when you start with the Physics and understand Epicurus' atomism and cosmology and their implications. But then studying and understanding the Canon provides a solid grounding in the here and now. And, at least for me, it's only at this point that the Ethics really makes sense.

I think one of the best ways to deal with your concern SmoothieKiwi is to focus on the issue that Epicurus is not telling you to ignore your feelings of abhorrence toward particular things, as the Stoics might. He is telling you to implement your feeling of abhorrence, and fight against those things as strongly as you can, because if you don't, then your worse fears may well materialize.

And one other thing that i like to state in this context is as to your choice of opponents to reference with the implication that they are uniquely evil, or a good example of the worst kind of evil. I think it is important to recognize in the Epicurean worldview that there is only pleasure and pain, and that just like the word "pleasure" is a placeholder for all kinds of things that

produce a feeling of pleasure in us, the word "pain" is also a placeholder. It is another discussion to go into this (which we need to explore) but it's pretty clear in Epicurus that there is no absolute ranking of things that bring "the best pleasure" or "the worst pain" except in very abstract and general terms. Pleasure and pain are very individual and contextual, and what one of us today considers the supreme evil because it stirs in us the worse pains, is going to be held as only an academic curiosity at another place and time.

I have a friend who somewhere picked up the example of saying to himself "dead babies, dead babies, dead babies" when he felt the need to immediately sober up in a very serious situation. All of us can summon up such images that strike the worst feelings of abhorrence in our minds. So I make this point not because I want to make a political point about Nazism vs Communism vs Capitalism or vs Islam or Christianity or Judaism or whatever, but because I think it is an important point of theory to recognize that what we consider to be "evil" comes in many forms, and that it is important to always apply the ultimate theoretical point: there is nothing intrinsically good but pleasure, and nothing intrinsically bad but pain. No matter who our worst enemy and symbol of evil might be, they too were / are people, and from their point of view there is nothing inherently "evil" about them. It is up to us (and to them) to pursue and to bear the fruits of their actions in terms of supporting our view of the pleasurable life and opposing our view of the painful life. The universe does not do it for us. As stated by Torquatus in explaining Epicurus' position:

Quote

Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?