

Godfrey's Epicurean Outline

Post by "Cassius" of December 22, 2018 at 5:15 PM

Let's continue the conversation (which you began too with a wall comment) as to practice. To me, I think as I said over there that while everyone is human and therefore certain things apply, such as that we need like-minded friends, we also have to remember that everyone is different. To me that means that everyone is going to have a different set of pleasures that they enjoy pursuing, and that their circumstances allow them to pursue at an appropriate cost of effort/pain.

I think all of the things you've listed are very good to do, but it occurs to me that the list is pretty mental, and we don't know anything about the types of things that you do in everyday life that bring you pleasure. From a very high-level point of view it is probably fair to say that within our personal circumstances we generally just want to spend more time doing things we find enjoyable and less time doing things we find painful, remembering of course that we sometimes choose pain / avoid pleasure as you know.

This section from the letter of Cosma Raimondi seems appropriate to help focus on both the mental but also how we act to spend our physical time:

"If we were indeed composed solely of a mind, I should be inclined to call Regulus 'happy' and entertain the Stoic view that we should find happiness in virtue alone. But since we are composed of a mind *and* a body, why do they leave out of this account of human happiness something that is part of mankind and properly pertains to it? Why do they consider only the mind and neglect the body, when the body houses the mind and is the other half of what man is? If you are seeking the totality something made up of various parts, and yet some part is missing, I cannot think it perfect and complete. We use the term 'human', I take it, to refer to a being with both a mind and a body. And in the same way that the body is not to be thought healthy when some part of it is sick, so man himself cannot be thought happy if he is suffering in some part of himself. As for their assigning happiness to the mind alone on the grounds that it is in some sense the master and ruler of man's body, it is quite absurd to disregard the body when the mind itself often depends on the state and condition the body and indeed can do nothing without it. Should we not deride someone we saw sitting on a throne and calling himself a king when he had no courtiers or servants? Should we think someone a fine prince whose servants were slovenly and misshapen? Yet those who would separate the mind from the body in defining human happiness and think that someone whose body is being savaged and tortured may still be happy are just as ludicrous.

I find it surprising that these clever Stoics did not remember when investigating the subject that they themselves were men. Their conclusions came not from what human nature demanded but from what they could contrive in argument. Some of them, in my view, placed so much

reliance on their ingenuity and facility in debate that they did not concern themselves with what was actually relevant to the enquiry. They were carried away instead by their enthusiasm for intellectual display, and tended to write what was merely novel and surprising — things we might aspire to but not ones we should spend any effort in attaining. Then there were some rather cantankerous individuals who thought that we should only aim for what they themselves could imitate or lay claim to. Nature had produced some boorish and inhuman philosophers whose senses had been dulled or cut off altogether, ones who took no pleasure in anything; and these people laid down that the rest of mankind should avoid what their own natural severity and austerity shrank from. Others subsequently entered the debate, men of great and various intellectual abilities, who all delivered a view on what constituted the supreme good according to their own individual disposition. But in the middle of all this error and confusion, Epicurus finally appeared to correct and amend the mistakes of the older philosophers and put forward his own true and certain teaching on happiness."

<https://newepicurean.com/suggested-reading/cosma-raimondi/>