

A Post At Facebook Relevant to Activism And Living As An Epicurean

Post by “Cassius” of May 2, 2022 at 7:37 AM

There are several good additional posts in this thread, but i have time at the moment to paste only this one by Nate followed by one by me:

Nate:

Philodemus offers a prescription and names it as such (pharmakos):

First up, don't fear God or divine punishment. Don't think that the Natural World responds to your intentions like a Universal Mind that is aware of your personal feelings and disposes you accordingly. Life is about learning, so if you fear being punished from masturbating, read about anatomy to dispel that fear. If you fear that life does not make sense, and only the universe acting against you can explain your circumstances, spend time re-considering how such socio-economic circumstances come to play.

Second, don't fear Death, Hell, or an afterlife. Your actions are not being tallied like a morality points in Knights of the Old Republic. Life does not reward you for playing its game after you turn off the game. Don't get distracted by empty speculation: focus on the cause-and-effect of the present. Knowing that you will be saved in an afterlife through faith can lead one to commit many self-destructive and imprudent behaviors. The opposite leads people to despair that they are cursed.

Third, remember that you can live an amazing life living with cheap food and good friendships. You are not being kept from happiness because you lack fame and wealth (just look at Will Smith and Johnny Depp). The best things in life are free, and it is easier to get them than it is a new car. A bag of rice is only a few dollars and will feed you for a week. Your stomach does not distinguish the economic value of an apple, only its digestibility. A happy stomach and a happy friend makes a happy person.

Fourth, if you are in an absolute worst-case-scenario, and the previous three points are doing nothing to ease you from either chronic pain or unmanageable anxiety, just know that the pain cannot last, and you have done a tremendous job by tolerating it, and it is almost done. If you have a psychiatric episode, know that it is closer to being done than it was a few minutes ago. If you have suffered a mortal wound, know that keeping things in perspective will make the end of life more pleasant.

Vipassana, formless meditation, the Eightfold path, raja yoga, hatha yoga, confessionals with priests, ritualistic prayer designed to elicit a deity's favor, fasting, hypnosis, cognitive-behavioral therapy, counseling, pharmaceuticals, and dietary restrictions will not work for everyone. Each has differing levels of efficacy depending on the patient. However, rejecting fear of God, fear of damnation, rejecting celebrity-worship, and keeping optimistic in the face of pain are universally healthy.

Aside from Philodemus' Tetrpharmakos, we are advised to repeat the practice of frankly speaking in a non-judgmental setting (parrhesia), which provides history with one of the first forms of psychological therapy, designed to allow one to acknowledge one's own faults and find opportunities for personal growth. It also serves to foster social bonding and encourage trust relationships between good friends, so people do not feel isolated and resigned to insurmountable obstacles.

And, of course, Epicurus directly prescribes for us to study his philosophy, for it is never too soon, nor too late to secure the health of one's soul. Reading his Epistles, the Vatican Sayings, the Wise Man Sayings, the book of fragments, the Doxai, the poetic translation of On Nature as Lucretius' De Rerum Natura, as well as supplemental literature to understand the historical context (De Witt, Long & Sedley, O'Keefe, Wilson, etc.) are all recommended practices for a person to cure their anxiety.

Cassius:

Epicurus himself made a number of references in his letters to his own pursuit of the study of nature, and of philosophy, as his method of pursuing happiness. I think that gets overlooked as too general and imprecise to be of much help, but I think there is more to it if you consider some of his other viewpoints: In chapter Four of Lucretius, there is a long discussion of the nature and function of "images," and how the mind processes the things that are around us and incorporates them into our lives - even to the extent of dreaming about them at night. And as referenced in the opening of Book Six, the way to approach serenely even issues like "the gods" is to have appropriate views about them.

This sounds a lot to me like a form of conditioning your mind and your attitudes by pursuing those activities and studies that lead to pleasure, and that lead to understanding that help you to deal with whatever pains you choose to accept or cannot avoid.

Several people have mentioned above that as individuals we find different things pleasurable, which leads to the view too that it's up to us to understand ourselves and our circumstances and to prudently organize our lives to produce the happiest result.

There's nothing magic in all this, nor should we expect there to be in a universe that is totally natural and without supernatural creation or control.

And to me that leads to one of the most key conclusions of all - that what Epicurus was mainly concerned about was orienting us to the way the world really works, and that there are no supernatural or absolute rules we are required to follow, so that it's up to us to "make hay while the sun shines."

There was a line in Chapter Fourteen of A Few Days in Athens that Frances Wright gives to Epicurus, which he says to a young student who has become attracted to the "vibe" of happiness that Epicurus had established in his Garden, but who had yet to crack a book as to the deeper and more controversial aspects of the philosophy - the student did not know that Epicurus taught that there is no supernatural god, no afterlife, no fate). Wright has Epicurus say to that student:

"I am sorry that you presumed so much, where you knew so little."

Rather than just presume that Epicurus was a direct competitor to the Stoics, and that he had the same presumptions and was after the same goals, we need to first dig into the details of what Epicurus was really teaching so we can see the full implications of the Epicurean worldview. After we see that it seems to me that the questions about "techniques" to live better become much easier to answer.