

Pleasures of the soul, Values, Meaningful Life

Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2022 at 7:17 AM

[Quote from beasain](#)

Peter Adamson use the term ascetic hedonism for Epicurism. What do you think of that?

I think that label and also the example are clearly *not* what Epicurus taught.

The example makes clear (at least as you have stated it) that he would accept the business class ticket only if there is " *no pain in exchange*" with the emphasis there on the "no" for our purposes of discussion.

While there are definitely statements which can be taken out of context would result in that 'ascetic' viewpoint, in my view if you take all the texts as a whole that a very different conclusion is compelled. To the contrary of asceticism, the goal is pleasure as that term is ordinarily understood, in which joy and delight and "active" pleasures are among the most enjoyable (what is most pleasant to a person is personal and contextual), and as a result we willingly embrace pain on a regular basis in exchange for pleasures that we deem to be much greater than the pains we incur as the cost of those pleasures.

Letter to Menoecus:

"And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant.

...

And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided. Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good.

Although the same statement is not made in the PD's explicitly, we have [PD08](#), which states the first part, and by implication the converse is also true and could be stated - "no pain is an evil thing in itself, but some pains bring with them pleasures many times greater than the pains."

[PD08](#). No pleasure is a bad thing in itself; but the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures.

And very clearly in Torquatus (On Ends):

Nor again is there any one who loves or pursues or wishes to win pain on its own account, merely because it is pain, but rather because circumstances sometimes occur which compel him to seek some great pleasure at the cost of exertion and pain.

So based on these and many other statements that can be retrieved from the texts there is no reason whatsoever to take the position that "ALL PAINS ARE TO BE AVOIDED ALL THE TIME" which is the logical implication of any form of "Ascetic" approach to Epicurus.

Avoidance of all pain as the goal of life is simply not what Epicurus taught. He taught the pursuit of pleasure as the goal of human life, which entails the expected and even at times desirable acceptance of pain for purposes of achieving pleasure.

One last cite:

Usener 423: "That which produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about {a jibe at the Peripatetics}, prating meaninglessly about the good."