

Pleasures of the soul, Values, Meaningful Life

Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2022 at 9:05 AM

[Quote from beasain](#)

Nobody is saying that you have to avoid by all means pain.

Beasain I am glad to see that *you* are not saying that, but in my reading of many people over a good number of years of studying Epicurus, I observe that there are many people who in fact DO say that. And to take the example you gave as literally written, "no pain" means "no pain." I don't mean to sound overly technical here as to the meaning of words, but it is exactly this issue which is in dispute. There are those, and this is entailed in the word "ascetic" who do in fact hold out "absence of pain" as a complete and full description of the highest good.

You'll recall that is exactly what [Hieronymus of Rhodes](#) advocated, and I see it in the wording of

What is it, then, that you ask? I will tell you, said I, and that for the sake of learning rather than of finding fault with either you or Epicurus. I too, said he, should be more desirous to learn of you, if you can impart anything worth learning, than to find fault with you.

Well, then, said I, you are aware of what [Hieronymus](#)¹ of Rhodes says is the chief good, to which he thinks that everything ought to be referred? I know, said he, that he thinks that the great end is freedom from pain. Well, what are his sentiments respecting pleasure? He affirms, he replied, that it is not to be sought for its own sake; for he thinks that rejoicing is one thing, and being free from pain another.

[Quote from beasain](#)

From there to "ascetic" is not that far away, I think.

I think if we are being precise in our wording, "ascetic" is as far away from "Epicurean" as North is from South, or East from West.

I realize that playing with definitions is largely a word game, and the subtleties of meaning vary widely and can be interpreted differently very easily by many people.

But I also think that it is possible to "generalize" about what a word means to "most people," and that in common discussion words carry meaning that is not strictly technical in philosophical discourse.

And EpicureanFriends is not targeted at professional academic philosophers, but "regular people." And I think it is fair to say that the "regular people" who we generally come into contact with interpret the word 'ascetic' to mean something that is incompatible with pursuit of any kind of mental or physical pleasure.

If we redefine "ascetic" to mean some kind of generic "rigorousness" in applying the calculation of "always pursuing the greatest pleasure as the ultimate goal" then that word would be fine. But virtually no one interprets it that way.

[Cambridge Dictionary:](#)

ascetic
adjective us
/ə'set.ɪk/ uk
/ə'set.ɪk/

[avoiding physical pleasures](#) and [living a simple life](#), often for [religious reasons](#): They [live](#) a very ascetic [life](#).

Definition of ascetic

1 : practicing strict [self-denial](#) as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline an ascetic monk an ascetic diet 2 : [austere](#) in appearance, manner, or attitude

ascetic

[uh-set-ik]

See synonyms for: [ascetic](#) / [ascetics](#) on Thesaurus.com

noun

a person who dedicates his or her life to a pursuit of contemplative ideals and practices extreme self-denial or self-mortification for religious reasons.

a person who leads an austere simple life, especially one who abstains from the normal pleasures of life or denies himself or herself material satisfaction.

(in the early Christian church) a monk; [hermit](#).

adjective Also as-cet-i-cal. relating to [asceticism](#), the doctrine that one can reach a high spiritual state through the practice of extreme self-denial or self-mortification.

rigorously abstinent; [austere](#): an ascetic existence.

exceedingly strict or severe in religious exercises or self-mortification.

So again Beasain let me repeat that I am not aiming this dispute at you personally. I think your interpretation you are stating is very compatible with what I read Epicurus as saying.

But for purposes of keeping the overall situation always in view, I think we need to recognize that considering Epicurean views to be related to ascetic views or practices in any way is a very dangerous thing to do, maybe not for the person (like yourself) who keeps the distinction firmly in view, but because in dealing with others we can never be sure that they will understand that subtlety.

That's why I take every opportunity like this to hit home the point. You yourself probably don't need it, but I wager that the majority of casual browsers who come across this discussion and read it need to be reminded of it (or, sadly, have it pointed out to them for the first time!)