

Kungi's Natural and Necessary Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of July 25, 2022 at 12:29 AM

Here is another way of asking my continuing question on this topic:

I think we can all agree that air, food, water, shelter from the rain, and warmth in the cold, are natural and necessary desires.

I think we can all also agree that one can obtain all of these by living in a cave and never straying far except to gather firewood, kills a few deer or rabbits for food and clothing, and to gather water from a nearby stream.

What guidance does this discussion of natural and necessary desires give us as to what else to aspire for and work for beyond these few things which are natural and necessary for life? Is anyone who seeks more than that cave lifestyle a bad Epicurean?

My position has always been that the principle of the classification is as Torquatus stated, that the N. And N are easy to obtain without much or any pain, and that those which are neither N. Nor N. can be obtained only with more effort and more pain.

And my view is that nowhere has Epicurus stated that we should confine ourselves to a strict list of N or N - just that we should be prepared to ask what will happen to us and that we be prepared to accept the consequences for our choices and avoidances according to our estimate of the pleasures and pains that will come from them.

If that is all we are talking about here I see no issues at all.

If, however, someone is seeing a suggestion that the best way of life for everyone is to always pursue that course which brings the least pain, regardless of the amount of pleasure obtainable by a person who accepts some pain as the cost, then I think that would be the issue that needs to be discussed much further.

While "putting minimal pain above all " might be a perfectly legitimate choice for a person to make, since we each have our preferences and tolerances, I do not at all see Epicurus promoting that as a general rule for everyone, just as he himself chose a course of school leadership which involved himself in regular controversies, in development of a school with legions of followers, in amassing several properties and even a number of slaves, and in prompting an eventual following of whom none I am aware were reputed in any way to be ascetic or living or promoting a "simplistic" lifestyle.

In sum i clearly see the ascetic / simplistic lifestyle being promoted as the Epicurean ideal in popular writers like OKeefe, but I am wondering if that is the implication of any of the discussion here. That's where I think the ultimate issue lies in this discussion, so that's the point

I keep trying to bring out. Is the best Epicurean the one who has so limited his desires that he lives closest to the cave lifestyle? Is that the way we should read the advice to Pythocles?

Torquatus was certainly right that weighing our choices by the N and N scale helps us predict the consequences of our actions, and discussing N and N helps us flesh out those questions. But predicting the consequences is entirely different from laying out a rule as to which consequences are to be chosen, and that's where we need to be very clear as to what we think Epicurus was saying as the general rule of the analysis.

It's that final step of drawing out the observations to their ultimate conclusion that I sense this discussion so far has not yet reached.