

Differences between Epicureanism and Cyrenaicism

Post by "Cassius" of September 1, 2022 at 12:05 PM

Yes as to the last post. Here is the excerpt from one of Jordan's posts that we discussed this past Wednesday night:

Quote

Indeed, it was through Epicurus that I discovered and became attracted to philosophical hedonism as a pragmatic way of life. However, like many others, I eventually grew disappointed with Epicurus' philosophy because of his strange and paradoxically ascetic hedonism — for Epicurus, pleasure is merely the absence of pain, particularly the mental pain of anxiety. In other words, Epicureanism is a form of *negative hedonism* which values the avoidance of pain over the seeking of pleasure. Whatever merits an analgesic philosophy like this might have, it certainly wasn't my ideal of hedonism. Indeed, I was delighted when I read that a contemporaneous hedonist school made fun of Epicureanism by saying that this state of absence of pain is the condition of a corpse!

And that witticism is how I discovered the Cyrenaic school.

I think Jordan is wrong in that paragraph to characterize Epicurus the way he does, but Jordan is in good company - it's my understanding that this is the reasoning that led Nietzsche away from Epicurus too.

The phrase "strange and paradoxically ascetic hedonism" is the key. Yes, there is something "strange and paradoxical" going on, but the issue is not in Epicurus, but in the mainstream way he is interpreted. Yes you can isolate a couple of passages in the letter to Menoecus and conclude that Epicurus taught "valuing the avoidance of pain over the seeking of pleasure." But when you read the WHOLE philosophy and the many texts that do not at all support such an interpretation, then it becomes possible to see that those passages in the letter to Menoecus are not really saying what it appears in isolation that they are saying.