

Episode One Hundred Thirty Eight - Letter to Menoeceus 5 - Pleasure Part One

Post by "Cassius" of September 6, 2022 at 5:09 PM

I think Martin's observations in the podcast were particularly helpful when he referred to pleasure as a "drive for action" or something like that. I remember analogizing that to Nietzsche's "will to power" phrase. I've never understood Nietzsche well enough to be sure what he was talking about, and I can't parse his original German phrase. But with the understanding that the "power" being referenced is not "power over other people" but "the power to obtain one's desires," I think the phrase fits what we are talking about. And I would think that given all the urgency that Epicurus and Lucretius display in pursuing pleasure without delay, and with knowledge that life is short, a good case can be made that "desire," in the very general sense of the will to pursue a pleasurable life, is something that Epicurus would urge to be maximized.

The issue seems to me to be that like "Pleasure," the word "desire" is a very high level abstraction and includes within in innumerable examples, some of which will lead to greater pleasure than pain if pursued, and some of which will lead to more pain than pleasure if pursued. And at that level it doesn't make sense to consider "desire in general" to be a negative thing, but rather a positive, and to ensure that it is a positive by categorizing the desires according to their expectancy of in fact leading to greater pleasure if pursued (which is in fact what the natural and necessary formula does).

So just like Pleasure, some Desires are to be pursued in certain circumstances, and some should not be pursued, but at no point do we consider either "Pleasure" or "Desire" to be tainted terminology. In fact I would come very close to applying the same phrasing as in the letter and paraphrase the result as: "All Desires are good, because they are desirable, but some desires may lead to more pain than pleasure and thus should not be chosen."

Of course that takes us down the road of parsing what "good" means, but that kind of parsing comes with the territory when there are no absolute standards, and only the feelings of pleasure and pain as ultimate guides.