

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

Post by "Don" of September 7, 2022 at 10:38 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I almost hate to comment on this because my thought is not major and I don't want to interrupt the stream of the posts from Don.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Sorry for the interruption - please carry on Don!

LOL! 😊 Methinks you imbue my stream of consciousness with too much significance, but I appreciate the thought.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So the comment "they just are" may be true in that they are not inherently bad or good, but if there is a larger component of choice attached to desires then that would be a significant difference (which reminds me of the comment later in the letter about attaching praise or blame).

Oh, I agree! My only intent was to get away from moral judgements. Desires arise naturally from our physical needs and from just living our life but they also arise from things we've been inculcated to desire by society and culture. They're not *morally* good or bad but they can be useful to our life and existence or detrimental to our well-being if we choose to follow them. If we choose NOT to follow those that are useful for our life, that's not going to go well for us. Likewise, if we choose TO follow unhealthy or harmful desires, that's not going to go well for us either. But we should leave the morality out of it. "Oh, you did THAT! You're a BAD person!"

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I remember and agree with what Joshua said in the episode about how often in the end it does not work to suppress desires.

Agreed! Suppression seems to me to be unnatural. You can deny there's a tiger behind the tree, but it's going to eat you nevertheless. Likewise, you can deny you have desires - "I can suppress my desires! Look at how righteous I am!" - , but those desires are going to well up, frustrate you, and they're going to come spilling out one way or the other.

That said, I think one can learn to recognize desires as they arise in the mind and to choose wisely which ones to follow and which ones not to. That's not suppressing our desires. That's gaining the facility to recognize helpful and harmful consequences more readily, more accurately, more wisely. It may look like suppression to someone unaccustomed to this kind of practice, but I think it is a very different thing.

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Also, the word "natural" has become hugely problematic--Natural Law, so called, is something like a 4th revelation in Christianity after the person of Jesus and the two testaments. Montaigne made the odd claim that atheism was 'unnatural', and the claims have only gotten worse since.

Agreed. What I like about "natural" in the context of Epicurus's writings and other Epicureans is that - originally - it wasn't tainted with our cultural baggage. But it's hard to extricate it from all that!! That's one thing I was trying to get at in post #31 above. That natural vs empty dichotomy to me is helpful in getting at the idea that "natural" desires arise within us from our being part of Nature: material, mortal beings living our lives. Some "only natural" (or unnecessary) desires come from acculturation (ex., a desire for a particular kind of food that brings pleasurable memories from childhood), but many - to my understanding - empty desires arise from being "told" by society/culture/media that we should - must! - want power, money, numerous material possessions ("Latest iPhone! Gimme! Gimme!"), etc.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I hope everyone will help us remember - however - that our goal should be to eventually emerge from these details with some high-level conclusions about what we think Epicurus was saying. We'll discuss as much of all this as we can on the podcast, but the goal eventually needs to be something in writing that summarizes the major distinctions between "desire" and "pleasure" in Epicurean philosophy.

Perhaps even a comparison chart with Desire and Pleasure as the column headings and as many lines as necessary for the major points about them and how they differ or are the same as to each point.

Agreed! Without a conclusion, we turn into ever-arguing Sophists! 😊 Some distinct points for me:

1. I am fully onboard with [Godfrey](#) 's insistence on maintaining the distinction between desire and pleasure. That's important.
2. My current contention is that Pleasure and Pain are the two big categories into which we can categorize everything that happens to us (the literal meaning of pathe).

3. As such, desire as a thing (What kind of thing?) is subordinate to or contained in or a component of one of those two buckets.
4. Observation: We can choose to fulfill a desire. We cannot choose to feel pleasure. I think that's an important distinction between these two categories.
5. Observation: In response to [Joshua](#) , I believe there is a distinction between "desiring something" and "hoping for something." I can desire a particular outcome, or I can hope for something (or as an alternative translation of elpis "have confidence in something happening"). I think those are two different things and I would contend that the desire is more basic while hope/confidence is more aspirational. Hmm... Maybe I'm just wordplaying here, but this is the direction I'm heading. Hope/Confidence/Elpis seems to always point toward a beneficial or pleasurable outcome, whereas the consequence of desire is not always beneficial to me. I can't think that an "empty hope" or "empty confidence" is a logical thing to say. Granted, I may "hope beyond all hope" or something like that. I am reminded of the recent Sandman episode where Dream and Lucifer are battling each other in a "Sword in the Stone" type Wizard duel and SPOILER Dream declares, "I am Hope." "[Lucifer was left flabbergasted and without a suitable counter because the Devil could not conceive of anything that could best Hope.](#)" I don't think it would have had the same impact or result if Dream had declared "I am Desire" (especially because Desire is one of Dream's Endless siblings).
 1. I realize I'm going off on a side track, but I just found [this link on The Sandman fan forum and it specifically links Desire \(of the Endless\) with the Greek word Epithumi](#) a! Sorry. Fan of the comics and the new Netflix show.

That'll do for now. I'll hold off on streaming any more until more can add their thoughts.