

Promising New Book ("Living For Pleasure") and Great New Article ("Are The Modern Stoics Really Epicurean?") Both By Emily Austin

Post by "Cassius" of November 19, 2022 at 8:41 AM

As to whether it's a "coping mechanism" I really think it's more a "thinking mechanism." In my view that the best way to understand the entire necessary and natural discussion is to put it in the context that Torquatus presents it, as a subtext of the discussion of wisdom. To me the key is to focus on what he says is "the principal of the classification" and see the discussion as a way not to cope but to think toward the future result rather than just blindly engage in every momentary pleasure:

Quote

The great disturbing factor in a man's life is ignorance of good and evil; mistaken ideas about these frequently rob us of our greatest pleasures, and torment us with the most cruel pain of mind. Hence we need the aid of Wisdom, to rid us of our fears and appetites, to root out all our errors and prejudices, and to serve as our infallible guide to the attainment of pleasure. Wisdom alone can banish sorrow from our hearts and protect its front alarm and apprehension; put yourself to school with her, and you may live in peace, and quench the glowing flames of desire. For the desires are incapable of satisfaction; they ruin not individuals only but whole families, nay often shake the very foundations of the state. It is they that are the source of hatred, quarreling, and strife, of sedition and of war.

Nor do they only flaunt themselves abroad, or turn their blind onslaughts solely against others; even when prisoned within the heart they quarrel and fall out among themselves; and this cannot but render the whole of life embittered. Hence only the Wise Man, who prunes away all the rank growth of vanity and error, can possibly live untroubled by sorrow and by fear, content within the bounds that nature has set. Nothing could be more useful or more conducive to well-being than Epicurus's doctrine as to the different classes of the desires. One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural without being necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary; the principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little, since nature's own riches, which suffice to content her, are both easily procured and limited in amount; but for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered.

In any situation where choices are involved, being wise means you're going to have to decide which desires to pursue based on the expected return in terms of pleasure and pain. Things that are "necessary" are gratified with little trouble or expense; things that are "natural" are also generally easily procured and limited in amount; but for the "imaginary" desires no bound or limit can be discovered.

To me the whole exercise is mainly a way to visualize and predict the expected the cost-benefit analysis. I don't see it as retrospective coping as much as I see it as a means of prospective anticipating the results so you can make wise decisions all the way through toward the goal of maximizing pleasure.