

Did Epicurus really oversell the power of science to diminish anxiety?

Post by "Cassius" of February 15, 2023 at 7:40 PM

My best thought on this subject would be like with everything else, it's a matter of the individual calculating what the future holds and whether he or she would rather die than continue living on in bad circumstances.

I don't really like talking about "psychological hedonism" or saying that everything we decide to do by default means that we think we will gain pleasure by it, but I definitely think that it is within the standard Epicurean calculation to think about what the future holds, even after we are gone, and to calculate the pleasure we would receive for the rest of our shortened lives by knowing that our death would "send a message" to later generations to pursue the same path. In most cases I doubt that would really make sense, but if we are going to be consistent that the universe has no absolute standards and that the individual is the only one who can make the call as to their own life, then I can certainly see that the "glory" that would come from standing up to the crowd would make it worthwhile to that person. So in that sense like in others I don't think that "glory" is necessarily a Stoic contention, any more than we would think about the appreciation of our children after we are gone if we were to do something that caused us to lose our lives for their sake.

In my own situation I really can't see why "moving" wouldn't be the better choice in most every situation, but I see as I get older how that gets harder and harder, and indeed if we are sure that we don't need to run the clock out to the very last second, then that does give us a certain strength of mind and spirit to spit in the face of our enemies and say "bring it on." Sometimes what even does kill us makes "us" stronger depending on what we take pleasure in.

I think the word "nicely" in this Vatican Saying destroys the sense and a better word (at the very least "well") is needed, but I think this conveys the spirit:

VS47. I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and I have closed off every one of your devious entrances. And we will not give ourselves up as captives, to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who cling to it maundering, we will leave from life singing aloud a glorious triumph-song on how nicely we lived.

As usual I think it's a bad idea to try to come up with a one size fits all rule. I haven't made this comment in the "frugal hedonism" thread, because I see the value in explaining words. But in the end I think the best way to convey this analysis is simply to call it "Epicurean" - and gradually begin the long crawl out of the box that we are in due to the dominance (and our

acceptance) of other people's paradigms.