

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

Post by "Don" of February 15, 2023 at 11:34 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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...

I think "psychological (or motivational) hedonism" is one of the better ways to describe Epicurus's philosophy to put it into a larger context.

[Quote from Excerpt from Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

Motivational Hedonism (more commonly referred to by the less descriptive label, "Psychological Hedonism") is the theory that the desires to encounter pleasure and to avoid pain guide all of our behavior. Most accounts of Motivational Hedonism include both conscious and unconscious desires for pleasure, but emphasize the latter. Epicurus, William James, Sigmund Freud, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and (on one interpretation) even Charles Darwin have all argued for varieties of Motivational Hedonism. Bentham used the idea to support his theory of Hedonistic Utilitarianism (discussed below). Weak versions of Motivational Hedonism hold that the desires to seek pleasure and avoid pain often or always have some influence on our behavior. Weak versions are generally considered to be uncontroversially true and not especially useful for philosophy.

I find that last sentence somewhat amusing because it seems to echo exactly what "Torquatus" says:

[Quote from "Torquatus"](#)

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them.

Seems useful for Epicurean philosophy.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

everything we decide to do by default means that we think we will gain pleasure by it

I just want to mention that from my perspective, we don't even need to "think we will gain pleasure by it." We just will, whether consciously or unconsciously, we will seek pleasure and avoid pain by virtue of being living breathing natural organisms... like every other natural organism with at least some agency.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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.

That statement seems uncontroversial enough. That's the reason, from my perspective, that Epicurus made his will. The *anticipation* of having his wishes fulfilled - even though he *knew* he wouldn't be around to see their fruition - gave him pleasure.

Bailey does use "well" in VS47. Bailey also attributes it to Metrodorus, and St.-Andre doesn't even include it in his list of the Vatican Sayings:

XLVII. I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all thy secret attacks. 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 here vainly cling to it, we will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that we have lived well.

And the word used is καλοῦ "well, beautifully, ..." and 24 other different meanings!

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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.

I would agree it's a "bad idea to try to come up with a one size fits all rule" in the case of dying for your beliefs or for any other reason. Those are ALL situations that are going to have entirely different contexts and mitigating circumstances, etc. My question though is "What do you mean by 'Epicurean'?" What does that word convey that the other words don't?

I'm going to make a similar post in the "frugal hedonism" thread and refer back here. This may even need a thread of its own.