

Ruminations on leading with “Pleasure and Pain as the Guide” v “The Goal is Pleasure”

Post by “Cassius” of June 9, 2023 at 6:57 AM

More thoughts:

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

To my understanding, there is a case to be made that the fundamental description of Epicurus’ ethics is “the faculty of pleasure and pain is the guide to life” and is a much better description than “pleasure is the goal (or the greatest good)”.

Why is it a much better description?

I would say something like: "It is better because it places the focus on the normal healthy pain-free operation of the organism, which involves both pleasure and pain. Until a person re-orientes his thinking to consider any kind of pain-free life to be pleasurable (rather than just active stimulations from the "outside"), a normal person is going to think that there are three "states" (pleasure, neutral, pain) and he is going to think that it is appropriate to reserve the word "pleasure" for times of external stimulation. This leaves large floating blocks of time in which neither pleasure nor pain are presumed to be relevant.

Once you accept the view that life is pleasurable whenever you are not experiencing pain, ****and no matter what you are doing**** you see that "pleasure" is the appropriate term for the state you wish to be in all the time, and you see that it is very fair to use "removal of pain" and "pursuit of pleasure" interchangeably.

This is the way you establish the overall correct perspective that "Pleasure" is the correct mental orientation to have toward life, and you can therefore say that you do everything for the sake of pleasure, rather than for the sake of "The God" or for the sake of "Virtue." This provides a simple and coherent worldview that wins out over the logical attacks of Plato et al against the use of "Pleasure" as the watchword of life. "Pleasure" is ice cream and cotton candy and rest and relaxation (and everything that is not painful) but for philosophic discussion purposes it is a placeholder "Flag" that we wave in response to "Rationality" or "Virtue" or "Piety."

This orientation endorses the view that life can be lived "full measure," and it says absolutely nothing that would lead one to believe that the best life is the most minimal or the most ascetic or best achieved by emptying your mind of thought or your body of sensation.