

How would you respond to an existentialist who says "You Epicureans have chosen pleasure as your meaning but it's not universal" do Epicureans hold that pleasure is the universal Good?

Post by "Little Rocker" of June 13, 2023 at 3:32 PM

Yeah, I definitely think it's an open question whether Epicurus thinks we are free to act on something other than what we consider most pleasant, so I agree with Godfrey that we might find ourselves pulled in both directions. The passage Cassius mentions from Torquatus definitely attributes psychological hedonism to Epicurus (we simply act on what we find most pleasant--we can just tell ourselves other stories). But there are some people who think Cicero is wrong about Epicurean psychological hedonism, and they usually point to KD 25, which seems to suggest that a person can act with reference to a goal other than pleasure. The people who think Epicurus believes we can act contrary to pleasure (but we shouldn't) are usually called 'ethical hedonists.'

I should add that I think Epicurus thinks we can still act for pleasure while choosing pain, but only when we think the pain leads to more pleasure overall. So we're still doing what we consider most pleasant.