

On freedom from distress = full pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of March 21, 2019 at 9:28 AM

Comments from another source but relevant to this discussion:

Poster:

I continue to have a hard time grasping this whole issue of pleasure. It has been drummed into my head for too many years that pleasures are fleeting, unreliable. We are to instead strive for serenity, peace of mind, equanimity, which is a more ascetic, idealistic outlook on life. But your answer to this question, Cassius, is quite helpful to me in my attempt to look at things from a more naturalistic outlook, rather than an idealistic one. I'm not sure why I'm having trouble in completely understanding all the issues involved in living an Epicurean life of pleasure, maybe it's because it's so hard to release the conditioning of past views. But it is pleasurable to think about these things, and quite invigorating, so I guess I am on the right track.

Cassius Amicus:

I think you've covered the bases. It is drummed into us that "pleasure" is a bad word, that it is superficial, fleeting, unworthy of attention. Cicero wrote to the effect that it was too embarrassing to talk about it in the Senate or in "the camp." But Cicero and all these ultra-establishment guys knew that "pleasure" was not their real enemy. Their real enemy was having people (their subjects/citizens) realize that their own FEELING of pleasure and pain was what Nature gave them as their guide. The Ciceronian establishment doesn't want people to see that they don't need the establishment's gods and the establishment's ideas of "virtue" in order to know how to live. And so they narrowed down the definition of pleasure to the most animalistic simplistic versions they could think of sex/drugs/rocknroll or wine/women/song and thereby tried to make the idea of living for pleasure a travesty.

But as Epicurus pointed out ALL feeling of any kind, physical or emotional or "spiritual) is either pleasure or pain, and any "reward" or "satisfaction" or "contentment" or "happiness" of any kind is something we FEEL, and therefore is rightly considered a pleasure just as much as bread and water to a hungry man.

That's why Holly I think that Epicurean philosophy is truly the most revolutionary possible. I don't know enough Marx to understand his interest in it, but I would think that virtually any revolutionist who appeals to his or her people's feelings of what they want to do would find affinity with Epicurus. It's the "establishment" that preaches idealistic "virtue" and the priests who preach "supernatural revealed religion" who Epicurus had in his crosshairs - and remain in his crosshairs if you understand the basics of the philosophy.

And I think that's exactly why the "establishment" view of Epicurus is that he taught that we should "instead strive for serenity, peace of mind, equanimity, which is a more ascetic, idealistic outlook on life."

Can you imagine any better philosophy to keep the sheep mild and passive and ready for shearing? (Well if you answered "Christianity!" I would have a hard time arguing, but Christianity is just one of the religions referenced that Epicurus was attacking in pre-existent form (as discussed by Nietzsche).

Here is a Nietzsche reference to Kant but it applies here directly to what Holly raised: "What destroys a man more quickly than to work, think and feel without inner necessity, without any deep personal desire, without pleasure—as a mere automaton of duty? That is the recipe for *décadence*, and no less for idiocy...."

"A nation goes to pieces when it confounds its duty with the general concept of duty. Nothing works a more complete and penetrating disaster than every "impersonal" duty, every sacrifice before the Moloch of abstraction.—To think that no one has thought of Kant's categorical imperative as dangerous to life!... The theological instinct alone took it under protection!—An action prompted by the life-instinct proves that it is a right action by the amount of pleasure that goes with it: and yet that Nihilist, with his bowels of Christian dogmatism, regarded pleasure as an objection.... What destroys a man more quickly than to work, think and feel without inner necessity, without any deep personal desire, without pleasure—as a mere automaton of duty? That is the recipe for *décadence*, and no less for idiocy...."

F. W. Nietzsche From The Antichrist - 11. (translated by H.L. Mencken)

Also from Antichrist:

The sneakishness of hypocrisy, the secrecy of the conventicle, concepts as black as hell, such as the sacrifice of the innocent, the unio mystica in the drinking of blood, above all, the slowly rekindled fire of revenge, of Chandala revenge—all that sort of thing became master of Rome: the same kind of religion which, in a pre-existent form, Epicurus had combatted. One has but to read Lucretius to know what Epicurus made war upon—not paganism, but "Christianity", which is to say, the corruption of souls by means of the concepts of guilt, punishment and immortality.—He combatted the subterranean cults, the whole of latent Christianity—to deny immortality was already a form of genuine salvation.—Epicurus had triumphed, and every respectable intellect in Rome was Epicurean—when Paul appeared... Paul, the Chandala hatred of Rome, of "the world"

Cassius:

(1) "I'm not sure why I'm having trouble in completely understanding all the issues involved in living an Epicurean life of pleasure, maybe it's because it's so hard to release the conditioning of past views." <<<<< That's exactly the main reason most of us face, I would contend.

(2) "But it is pleasurable to think about these things, " <<< And that is why I am convinced that the answer to reclaim Epicurus is not dialectical logical discussion and lecturing and classroom instruction. Those are the tools of the Platonists who said no one could enter unless they understood geometry. The way to understand Epicurus is FEELING -- which is what he pointed to as the source of all knowledge - again a word (like pleasure) that needs to be widely understood.

(3) "and quite invigorating," And in fact revolutionary! 😊

(4) "so I guess I am on the right track." Yes I think you are. It's the people who pass over these arguments and don't think that they are important, and who think that all that matters is to "be happy" that are NOT on the right track.