

Would You Rather Live For A Week As (1) Epicurus During the Last Week of His Life or (2) An Anonymous Shepherd Laying In The Grass In The Summertime With No Pain At All?

Post by "Cassius" of September 8, 2023 at 3:14 AM

Is not judging pleasure by length of time specifically denied to be a good idea by Epicurus?

Letter to Menoeceus:

"And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant."

As for the hypo I will specify for the Facebook version that "for a week" means that you only have one week to live in either scenario at the end of which your life is over. That makes it easier to see that the choice involves "how does one spend the time that one has."

The alternative of "for a week" meaning the equivalent of a trip to the beach after which you return to your present self might also be useful as a warmup to consider first, but would not frame the question so starkly.

And of course in life we have a lot more choices than these two to choose from, just as we have many pleasures to choose from, but the point of a hypothetical is to focus on a key issue for purposes of understanding a deeper lesson.

In this case: Are all pleasures equally to be chosen? If so, how do we choose among them? If not, why not?

Simply saying "Choose pleasure and avoid pain, while sometimee choosing pain to avoid a worse pain or get greater pleasure" answers that question generally, but is that all there is to be said about the nature of the choice of pleasure to seek? If that is all that can be said philosophically then that itself is important to know. If we think Epicurus said more, what else as a key philosophical rule that would apply here?

Another warmup question might be: "A former Torquatus put his son to death for violating a military rule, and our Torquatus justified that as a decision consistent in nature with an Epicurean perspective. This despite the other Epicurean rule that we sometimes die for a friend. Does that tell us anything about the Epicurean position for choosing among pleasures and pains?"