

Is All "Ataraxia" Equal?

Post by "Cassius" of November 19, 2023 at 12:32 PM

Yep now we are getting to the reasons why this needs to be discussed.

[Quote from Don](#)

. Once you start down pain and pleasure "units" - dolors and hedons - you've left Epicurean philosophy and are talking Utilitarian philosophy. Which is one reason I'm reluctant to wholeheartedly endorse Godfrey's location, intensity, duration formulation.

I think you're correctly connecting the issues, and I don't like "the greatest good for the greatest number," but I am not ready to throw out efforts to quantify pleasure as inherently inappropriate. Yes that seems to be with what the Benthamites were struggling with, but I don't know enough of their texts to say whether they got it wrong or not.

This issue of choosing among pleasures has to be articulated in some way other than saying "more pleasant" or "less pleasant" if we are to communicate to people what we are talking about. Because I can't conceive that anyone would say that "all pleasures are equal in every respect." If they are not equal in *every* respect, then do we not need to explore and articulate the differences?

[Quote from Don](#)

Regardless of the possible bread and water interpretation, I think this *is* what Epicurus taught. Know - at a gut level - what you absolutely need to live a self-sufficient, pleasurable life of well-being. Then you *know* if everything else was tragically taken from you, IF all other sources of (kinetic) pleasure were removed from you, you would still be able to lead a life of pleasure without pain on that. BUT he also taught to ENJOY the varieties of pleasure available to us here and now.

I think this is where France Wright was correct in framing the argument between Zeno and Epicurus, and Cicero was showing his intelligence by picking out the same issue: the question is "Does Epicurean philosophy leave the door wide open to *whatever* interpretation of pleasure one desires to make?"

Would indeed Epicurean philosophy have nothing to say between Lucretius at a young age (1) deciding to spend his life shepherding sheep on a hillside vs (2) deciding to become an epic poet and spending his life composing "On The Nature of Things?"

We can pose the question pretty easily: Lucretius as a lifelong shepherd living without pain would be at the exact same height of pleasure as Lucretius the Epic Poet living without pain. We can say that easily because our definitions of the hypothetical make them both "without pain" and therefore "at the height of pleasure."

What in Epicurean philosophy provides the guidance to the young Lucretius to tell him to pursue the life of the epic poet vs the life of the shepherd.

(I have nothing against shepherds -- just using them as a convenient paradigm example.)

I would say that even if we say that both lives are "without pain" and therefore the height of pleasure, we could say that one choice or the other would be "more pleasurable" in the specific case of Lucretius. If we can say that, we ought to be able to explain how, and why that choice would be appropriate for him, even though any pains involved in the life of an epic poet would be quite different from the pains confronting a shepherd.

If we simply say 'one option is more pleasurable and you simply have to figure it out for yourself' - that might be a viable answer. I am asking "Is that the best we can do to explain the choice?"