

The Axiology of Pain and Pleasure (are they intrinsic good/bad ?)

Post by "Cassius" of June 5, 2024 at 9:53 AM

It is unfortunate that some people are going to see these back-and-forths as uncomfortable or disconcerting but this is the only way we will get to greater clarity.

And more clarify is needed because I think there is a significant number of people who come at Epicurus in a modified-Cicero way.

They understand "pleasure" to mean the equivalent of "sex drugs and rock and roll," and they would like Epicurus to tell them how to experience that feeling all the time.

They understand that there are limits to sex, drugs, and rockandroll specifically, but they hear "pleasure" and they think that Epicurus is going to instruct them in a new experience, hither-to unknown and undiscovered by them, which they will find to be a feeling of stimulation equivalent to sex drugs and rockandroll, but without the "hangover."

So they concentrate on "removing pain" from their life, working toward asceticism, trying to be as "altruistic" and as "good" a person as they can, and they wait and wait for that transcendent moment when in a blinding flash of light they experience this new feeling that does in fact feel as strongly agreeable to them as sex, or drugs, or rockandroll.

Such a moment will never come, but it was never promised.

What was stated instead, is that if you *think* about life correctly (correctly meaning that there are no supernatural gods, platonic "good," or life after death), then you see that "life" allows you to participate in an unlimited number of mental and physical activities which are rewarding in all sorts of ways. With this attitude toward life it is much easier to experience all sorts of agreeable mental and physical activities. You don't have to live under the cloud of thinking that you are being watched by a supernatural god, or that you have to conform to some kind of Platonic ideal, or watch out for punishment or reward after death.

But this attitude toward life and and they way you conduct yourself under its influence is *not* in fact the same experience as continuous sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Those who study Epicurus expecting to find that result will get very disappointed and disillusioned. They will fall back into their old habits of looking for magical stimulative fixes that they think might actually allow them to experience those stimulations constantly.

Looking at your hand as feeling pleasure, when the world tells you that your hand is just sitting there doing nothing, does not magically make your hand feel as if it is being massaged. Looking at your hand or your life that way is more of a paradigm shift. The new paradigm allows you to

appreciate it when your hand (or life) is healthy, and makes you realize that it is important for you to take proper actions to maintain that health, because when your hand and life are gone, they are gone forever, and they have no experience at all afterwards. You won't consider non-existence to be terrible, because it's not painful, but it is sure as heck is preferable to be alive and experience the pleasures that are possible to the living.

I think if we don't make this clear then we end up talking past each other like Cicero ignoring what Torquatus was saying to him. Worse, we end up wasting a lot of time that we should otherwise devote to living our lives under the certainty that there are no supernatural gods telling us what to do, and that there is no life after death to cause us to worry about reward or punishment. Once we are sure of those things we don't withdraw into our private gardens as if we are fleeing from pain, but we engage prudently with life according to our circumstances and make the most of it.

So I think these discussions are very helpful to clarify these questions.