

Would Epicurus say: "Infinite Time contains no more pain than limited time when the limit of pain is measured by reason?"

Post by "Cassius" of July 21, 2024 at 8:42 AM

I'm continuing on a tangent away from the main purpose of the thread, so eventually we need to get back to that. However one more thing on the "vessel" picture. In my mind maybe the thing that makes this analogy most useful is this, and pardon my french but I need to be emphatic:

Quote

The vessel visualization makes clear how to refute one of the most damnably perverse readings that many people give to an important passage in the letter to Menoecus, translated by Bailey as: "[128] The right understanding of these facts enables us to refer all choice and avoidance to the health of the body and (the soul's) freedom from disturbance, since this is the aim of the life of blessedness. For it is to obtain this end that we always act, namely, to avoid pain and fear. And when this is once secured for us, all the tempest of the soul is dispersed, since the living creature has not to wander as though in search of something that is missing, and to look for some other thing by which he can fulfill the good of the soul and the good of the body. For it is then that we have need of pleasure, when we feel pain owing to the absence of pleasure; but when we do not feel pain), we no longer need pleasure.

The damnably perverse Stoic/Buddhist interpretation of the underlined section is that what we are really after is "getting rid of pain" and nothing matters - nothing else is important - except that. So they read that as "when we don't have pain we don't need pleasure."

The part they leave out purposely is that when you are alive and not feeling pain you ARE feeling pleasure whatever you are doing!

Epicurus is not describing a point at which you "don't need pleasure," he's describing a point at which you "don't need MORE pleasure," and the reason you don't need MORE pleasure is that you already have all the pleasure you can handle!

I'm not singling out Stoics or Buddhist as intrinsically bad people, but to the extent Stoicism and Buddhism stand for this proposition - that we don't need and shouldn't want pleasure - then I am singling out any such doctrines/philosophies/religions as intrinsically "bad" from the point of

view of a philosophy based on nature like Epicurus promoted.

Another point raised last night is that this discussion has something to do with infinity, at least in practical terms. For out into infinity - or at least as long into the future as supernatural religions dominate the world, people who read the Letter to Menoeceus are going to come across that same passage, and they are going to be bewildered at how to fit the pieces together.

The supernatural religionists/Buddhists/Stoics/Humanists are always going to try to pull that statement out of its context and use it to argue that "Pleasure" is not the real goal of Epicurus. It's in their nature - those groups are in fact enemies of pleasure and this world, as Nietzsche might say, and they are going to use every argument they can to dissuade people from pursuing pleasure.

The unfortunate truth is that most readers of normal upbringing are not going to be able to see through the deception unless they are given an explanation. They will need the vessel analogy, or the explanation that the hand when not in pain is in pleasure, or the comparison of the host pouring wine for the thirsty guest, or other analogies yet to be invented.

When you are talking with someone who does not understand this view of Epicurus - and that's what most generalist articles and books are doing, they are talking to people who don't already understand - simply stating that "pleasure is the absence of pain" is not sufficient, standing alone. It's necessary to go further to explain Epicurus' complete way of looking at "pleasure" as the single word that describes the ultimate goal. Epicurus didn't write "pleasure is the absence of pain" in the letter to Menoeceus and then stop - he provided a much broader picture in the rest of the letter. He didn't stop there, and we shouldn't either, so picking that phrase and isolating it as if it is self-evident out of context is not promoting Epicurean philosophy, it's perverting it.