

Epicurean versus deceptive (“modern”) Stoic decision making

Post by “Cassius” of August 10, 2024 at 11:20 AM

There are many different ways of looking at things and therefore lots of charts, but I am tempted to say in the fundamental abstract that the first question is always as stated in "[VS71](#)". Every desire must be confronted by this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished, and what if it is not?"

In my own mind I have a very hard time separating "desire" from "pleasure and pain" and "choice and avoidance" or even "willpower," and that's a major reason I have a problem separating out "desire" as if it is some fundamental of human nature apart from everything else. I think they are all a part of a bigger picture and acting as if there is a "desire" part of your brain that acts totally on its own is going to lead to lots of problems. Apart from the fundamental bodily needs it seems to me that what one desires is a complicated sum of all sorts of other influences and thoughts up to that moment of life, and all of those components have to be considered in how one's "desires" or "emotions" came into existence.

[Quote from Julia](#)

True, and very good point. If one is powerless but enjoys thinking about something - maybe the outcome of match of one's favourite sports team - then there would be nothing wrong with that

[Quote from Julia](#)

For me - by chance - it happens to be that everything I do in fact think about but cannot change are things which make me very unhappy (primarily contemporary politics).

The example of sports I think works very well. As a spectator you can't change the results of the game, and yet your observation of it certainly brings lots of pain or pleasure to some people. I am not a big sports fan myself (and don't remember that I ever was) but there can be lots of real benefits from being a "fan" of a particular team or sport, and I wouldn't think Epicurus would disapprove of it just because you have no influence over a particular game.

As to contemporary politics I agree that this is a topic of major concern. Our rule against discussing it on the forum is for the sake of the greater goal of pursuing the work of "Team Epicurus," and "Epicurus" doesn't have a stake in any political position other than as it directly affects Team Epicurus. Some political issues have to be dealt with even under the rules, and so

there are considerations on such issues as "censorship" and "free speech" where we already have to calibrate how best to proceed.

Here too I think Epicurus would say that the practical implications of political issues as they affect individuals cannot be ignored, and I would personally encourage everyone to firmly maintain awareness of world affairs that could impact them, and adjust their lives accordingly. But for the sake of the EpicureanFriends project we need to strictly moderate that here, so other venues for individual communication need to be used to pursue those adjustments to purely political events. I think we already have lots of private communications going on between members of EpicureanFriends without those bleeding over into problems for the forum, and that's something that probably needs to expand over time.

[Quote from Julia](#)

For example, if I were given the option, I (or certainly a younger me) would probably decide that my grief is limitless (unnatural) anyway and thus to be avoided (equal parts naive to or wilfully ignorant of the fact that this will cause psychological baggage for the rest of my life), rather than allow myself to feel it, to work through the emotion (and thus trade unpleasantness now for more of a spring in my step later).

One aspect of this time that has been on my mind recently is how giving in to worry about suffering is totally unproductive. By worrying or focusing on the suffering in life, we don't do a thing to correct that suffering, or extend our own lives by an hour. The time spent on feeling bad about suffering is just subtracted from your life never to come again. I understand it's something we all go through and I go through it myself, but I think I am finding the best way to get over it is to focus on one of the many reminders that life is short and for an eternity we will be no more.

[VS10](#). Remember that you are mortal, and have a limited time to live, and have devoted yourself to discussions on Nature for all time and eternity, and have seen "things that are now and are to come and have been."

I obviously don't think that should be read to mean "you have a limited time to live and therefore you should spend all your time "discussing" life. I think it means you've devoted yourself to understanding the big picture and then taking action to apply that knowledge to using your life to your best ability. And simply feeling overwhelmed by sorrow doesn't strike me as a good use of limited time. Some things can't be changed, but there's usually something that can be done to improve almost any situation.