

Why Minimizing All Desire Is Incorrect (And What To Do Instead)

Post by “Joshua” of December 4, 2024 at 7:36 PM

I may be alone in this, but I continue to think that desire is a kind of pain. We feel it as pain because we feel it as dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction is a kind of pain.

This is not an argument for asceticism; it is sometimes used as a *premise* in arguments for asceticism, but there is no reason to think that the one follows from the other.

Quote

In order that Idomeneus may not be introduced free of charge into my letter, he shall make up the indebtedness from his own account. It was to him that Epicurus addressed the well-known saying urging him to make Pythocles rich, but not rich in the vulgar and equivocal way. "If you wish," said he, "to make Pythocles rich, do not add to his store of money, but subtract from his desires."

Event Date: 60 LA

§ 21.8 This idea is too clear to need explanation, and too clever to need reinforcement. There is, however, one point on which I would warn you, - not to consider that this statement applies only to riches; its value will be the same, no matter how you apply it. "If you wish to make Pythocles honourable, do not add to his honours, but subtract from his desires"; "if you wish Pythocles to have pleasure for ever, do not add to his pleasures, but subtract from his desires"; "if you wish to make Pythocles an old man, filling his life to the full, do not add to his years, but subtract from his desires."

Event Date: 60 LA

§ 21.9 There is no reason why you should hold that these words belong to Epicurus alone; they are public property. I think we ought to do in philosophy as they are wont to do in the Senate: when someone has made a motion, of which I approve to a certain extent, I ask him to make his motion in two parts, and I vote for the part which I approve. So I am all the more glad to repeat the distinguished words of Epicurus, in order that I may prove to those who have recourse to him through a bad motive, thinking that they will have in him a screen for their own vices, that they must live honourably, no matter what school they follow.

Event Date: 60 LA

§ 21.10 Go to his Garden and read the motto carved there: 'Stranger, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure.' The care-taker of that abode, a kindly

host, will be ready for you; he will welcome you with barley-meal and serve you water also in abundance, with these words: "Have you not been well entertained?" "This garden," he says, "does not whet your appetite; it quenches it. Nor does it make you more thirsty with every drink; it slakes the thirst by a natural cure, a cure that demands no fee. This is the 'pleasure' in which I have grown old."

-Seneca, Letters to Lucilius

I'm quite happy to endorse Epicurus as quoted. Seneca will have to answer for his own additions in section 21.8: at any rate, I should say that 'if you wish Pythocles to have pleasure for ever, add to his pleasures AND subtract from his desires.'

Quote

Have you not been well entertained?

Maybe Ridley Scott is a fan after all!