

Wilson (Catherine) - "The Pleasure Principle"

Post by "Cassius" of June 8, 2019 at 3:38 PM

I agree with you as to "orientation" Joshua. And I bet if I had taken the trouble to read the text first, there might be explanations there that would make it clear.

As to "moral relativism" the more I think about anything involving "morality" the more I question whether the Epicureans even spoke in that term as we use it today. Certainly they spoke about "virtue" and "good" and "evil" but do we have good cites from Epicurus or Lucretius talking about "morality" as anything other than tied to pain and pleasure?

For example in your sentence: ". An Epicurean *may well argue* that slavery was immoral even in ancient Greece, in spite of their social conventions, specifically *because* the slave was never a party to the 'social contract' in the first place." The Epicurean would surely note that the relationship is pleasurable to the owner, and painful to the slave, and that if the relationship did not come about by agreement (I suppose that is possible) then it would be unjust. And even if it came about by agreement at first, and the parties changed their mind, then we would at most have a breach of contract, not anything that violates any kind of abstract natural or divine or ideal law.

But would an Epicurean talk in terms of their being some kind of outside standard of "morality" which slavery in ancient Greece (or any other place) violated?

Certainly we have the example of Cassius Longinus who decided that Caesar (arguably a dictator against the law) offended his sense of *something* enough to assassinate him and to go to war against his successors. In those letters between him and Cicero he talks about the interrelation between virtue and pleasure as they applied to that situation, but I don't recall that he spoke in terms of the problems being one of "morality" or Caesar being "immoral."

Sometimes it is hard to separate the philosophical issue from the emotion of the particular example (slavery, here) but I think that is exactly what Epicurus was advising in those PD's on Justice from 30-40.

We personally find some things so painful and offensive to us that we go to war and fight to the death over them, but if there is no god, no ideal forms, no abstract eternal truths, then when we fight to the death we should realize that we are fighting for our own preferences, not because we are vindicated by gods or outside standards.

At least that is the way I am reading it. I am very interested in any opinions otherwise, or with a different twist on it, but I think the Epicurean fundamental principles of the way the universe work compel that conclusion.