

Evaluating "In Defense of Being Average"

Post by "Cassius" of June 14, 2019 at 8:58 AM

E:

Mark Manson identifies as a Stoic, so it makes sense that his articles reflect that... but what an interesting question you ask, what Epicurus would say about mediocrity...

Seems like it would depend on the situation. If a pleasure couldn't be increased by time spent developing a skill level, then I wouldn't likely care about doing it.

There are some things I enjoy being really good at, but my skill doesn't depend on others not being good. It's funny that Manson assumes excellence has to be competitive, when it could just mean accurate. We could all have excellent grammar, for instance, and this wouldn't be a competition. All doctors could in theory make accurate diagnoses.

This afternoon, I did a zoom interview for a training program I want to enter, to learn to do a particular procedure in medicine. The interviewer asked me "how do you think you might stand out from other applicants?" And I laughed and said "I don't know, because I haven't seen their files... but actually I hope I don't stand out-- I hope there are a lot of applicants who are very qualified to learn this, in case someone in my family needs to have it done!" ? She liked that answer.

So when I learn this procedure, I will have the goal of doing it as well as possible, for the pleasure of working without stress, for the income from it, and of course, for not being sued due to incompetence...

Ok, I guess what I am getting at here is that there's a natural limit to skill, for most things. And in some cases I will want to reach that limit, if pleasure increases. In others, such as precise laundry folding, I don't care. I'm not going to iron my underwear, lol. That wouldn't give me pleasure.

Cassius:

I should have realized that his tone marked him as a stoic and now when I look at his home page it jumps out further.

I agree with you that being very good at something doesn't necessarily entail competitiveness, and probably that is a stoic artifact that he associates the two as being necessarily connected.

We don't allow doctors in Appalachia to perform medicine at a standard of care lesser than New York City - the standard of care is national, as I understand it, but I don't think most of us would expect to receive the same standard of care in some isolated subsaharan desert.

Realizing that everyone can't be "the best" on a scale is simply a fact that we shouldn't be afraid of, and the competitiveness angle is a trap too, but it seems to me that there's something about the "tone" or the way he views the subject that goes beyond accepting reality and creeps into a very stoic-like suppression of the emotion of being good at something that most anyone can experience in at least some areas of life. More "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" stoic over-rationalizing.

Pretty much what you would expect from someone who would write "The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F*ck"