

Comments on "What Epicurus Can Teach Us About Freedom and Happiness"

Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2018 at 7:19 AM

I don't think I have seen this article linked here before, but it's a pretty good one, ending with this summary which is a lot better than most: "Do not fall into quietism or fatalism; seek happiness with a zeal – in friendships and long conversations, in the pleasures nature has provided us, in the fruits of our reason and imagination, and in the avoidance of vain ambitions for power over others."

<https://fee.org/articles/what-...-and-happiness/>

RW: would have expected a comment on his statement of "...the ultimate pleasure being the absence of bodily pain and tranquility of the mind."


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[Cassius Amicus](#) type unknown

[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#) You are right Ron I am slipping! Thank you for noticing as that does seriously undercut the article for me! I guess my expectations are sliding, and I was satisfied simply that the author got the picture of Epicurus right, and didn't confuse him with Epictetus!  type unknown

The writer implicitly acknowledges that (on the surface) the apparent meaning of this is a contradiction, by beginning his next sentence with "Nevertheless" -- "Nevertheless, because Epicurus claimed the ultimate aim of happiness is to find pleasure – and not virtue or knowledge unto themselves – many of his contemporaries and later critics would uncharitably accuse him of advocating debauchery, one even saying he “vomited twice a day from over-indulgence,” and that his understanding of philosophy and life in general was wanting."

What he doesn't do, and what is left to people who are really devoted enough to the issue, is to dig out why "absence of pain" does not conflict with "pleasure" as the ultimate goal.

The writer is content to leave the issue at the level of (my take) "just another idiosyncrasy of those weird philosophers - never can take everything they say - have to pick and choose." And so he doesn't explore the meaning of pleasure of the doctrine that pleasure and pain are the only two feelings (which is the reason that in measuring any feeling, absence of one equals the

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/245-comments-on-what-epicurus-can-teach-us-about-freedom-and-happiness/?postID=365#post365>

presence of the other).

At this stage of the game I suppose I am happy when someone is able to look past the obvious problem with this common confusion over "absence of pain" and still write about Epicurus anyway. Especially to say ""Do not fall into quietism or fatalism; seek happiness with a zeal."

For me, if I were an "outsider" and came across Epicurus and the "highest good is the absence of pain" contention, that would be the first and last time I would devote any effort to him. I think that happens a lot, and turns a lot of good people off - and that it happens that those particular good people, who are looking for justification of the pursuit of happiness - are exactly the people we should want to appreciate Epicurus the most!

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[Cassius Amicus](#) My last comment to Ron is worth repeating: The reason I harp on the "absence of pain" issue is that the modern majority interpretation of "absence of pain" is going to turn off exactly the people who are most naturally Epicureans, and turn them away from Epicurus. This modern non-pleasure-based interpretation makes no effort to explain what this state of "absence of pain" really is, because it makes no sense and contradicts many other clear statements made by Epicurus.

At the same time, the modern majority position it is going to attract those who are most naturally Stoic, and who are constitutionally unsuited for Epicurean philosophy due to their antipathy to normal pleasures. That is one of the primary reasons I think Epicurus has languished in the shadows while the people who are most naturally Epicurean, but who don't have access to a coherent explanation of this issue, turn in disappointment in some other direction.

This confusion wastes the time of the Stoics, deflates and depresses Epicureans, and serves no purpose other than to fuel the fire of those who like to debate for the sake of debate, and to protect the preserve of the academics who claim that only they can truly understand Epicurus.