

Wilson (Catherine) - "The Pleasure Principle"

Post by "JAWS" of July 6, 2019 at 10:10 PM

I recently decided to go back to the beginning of this book and read it more carefully. So this post is about a few things that caught my attention while reading the Preface.

1) At the bottom of page 6 she makes this comment about Epicureans: "Their moral philosophy is relational rather than individualistic." I would provide more of the paragraph for context, but when I read it, I feel like this sentence really stands alone. The way that I would interpret this sentence is that the Epicurean morality is dependent on the overall social implications rather than on individual pleasure, and I don't agree with that. Do you think I am misinterpreting this sentence? If so, what do you take it to mean? If not, do you agree with Catherine Wilson on the Epicurean morality? Then again, perhaps this is a silly question because I don't think that Epicurean philosophy has any sort of absolute morality, does it?

2) At the bottom of page 7, she says "My perceptions don't have any special claim to objectivity, and my preferences - indeed, human desires in general - don't deserve automatic priority over the preferences of other people and animals." I do not disagree with this sentence, but I think that my reason for agreeing is very different from what her lack of explanation suggests. My reason for agreeing with the sentence is that I feel the hedonic calculus needs to be considered and giving automatic priority to our own preferences may have consequences that could net out as more pain than pleasure. However, I feel like her lack of explanation suggests that Epicureans question their own preferences and deny them on the basis of some greater good, which I don't think would be very Epicurean. Again, I don't hate the sentence, just the lack of explanation around it, but maybe I'm reading too much into it.

3) Starting at the bottom of page 10 and going on to page 11, she has a block of sentences that I am uncomfortable with. "Although it might seem surprising in light of the many attacks from medieval and early-modern Western theologians on Epicureanism for its atheistic framework, the Epicurean conception of the good and meaningful life can even be found in the Jewish and Christian bibles. Ecclesiastes 8:15 says, 'Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry.' Isaiah 22:13 says, 'Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die.'" This may seem nitpicky, but I don't like the term meaningful life. Is there an Epicurean conception of the meaningful life? Or is meaningful life synonymous with pleasurable life? This is an important question to me, because I don't believe that life has some absolute meaning and, up to this point, I didn't think that Epicurus necessarily disagreed. Am I wrong? I'm also curious what you think of the quotes from the bible. Is that a fair synopsis of the Epicurean conception of the good life - to eat, drink, and be merry? It seems too simplistic to me and suggests a hedonism that is more in line with the Cyrenaics than the Epicureans.