

A Quote from Hobbes' "Leviathan"

Post by "Cassius" of August 15, 2019 at 10:38 AM

I'm not an expert by any means on Hobbes so I am sure at some point we meet with fundamental divergence from Epicurus -- Hobbes is not known as an Epicurean, to my understanding, so somewhere he goes off in another direction.

David I think you're getting to the issue that Epicurus seems to describe as the "confident expectation" of continuing to experience pleasurable living. Certainly we do need to prepare for hunger in the future by planting crops in the spring, etc.

Desire isn't a bad thing at all - it's natural and in fact the desire for pleasure is THE motivating force of all life, as stated in many ways through the Epicurean texts.

"Contentment" can never be stretched in Epicurean terms to the point where we say. "OK I've lived a happy life til this point, I think I'll choose to die now." because that would be perverse.

From the letter to Menoeceus I think it is clear that life is desirable and it is unnatural and perverse to choose to die before it becomes necessary: "The wise man does not deprecate life nor does he fear the cessation of life. The thought of life is no offense to him, nor is the cessation of life regarded as an evil. And even as men choose of food not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant and not merely that which is longest. And he who admonishes the young to live well and the old to make a good end speaks foolishly, not merely because of the desirability of life, but because the same exercise at once teaches to live well and to die well. Much worse is he who says that it were good not to be born, but when once one is born to pass quickly through the gates of Hades. For if he truly believes this, why does he not depart from life? It would be easy for him to do so once he were firmly convinced. If he speaks only in jest, his words are foolishness as those who hear him do not believe. "

I worry a little bit that some people are perceiving a tension between "absence of pain" and proper desires as to lifespan. I don't think Epicurus said at all that it is unnatural or undesirable to live as long as possible. We can and do wish to continue living as long as our minds and bodies are sustainable in a position of net pleasure, and there is nothing wrong with that even under the Epicurean formulas.

It's really Stoic / Platonic / JudeoChristian pollution which causes us to think in terms of living "forever" or reaching some plateau of perfection that once we reach it, that plateau is the equivalent of living forever, or living in a state of divinity.

I don't see anything in Epicurus which deviates from the common sense approach: we live minute by minute as long as our circumstances allow. We can direct our attention at any time

to the past, present, or future, but all we can really control is our current level of pleasure and pain at the current moment of experience. And we should wish to continue to prolong our lives as long as we can reasonably expect that those current moments of experience will be, or will return to being, net pleasurable.

Just because we don't NEED to live forever in order to live a fulfilled life, that's no reason that we don't want to continue to live as long as possible while conditions allow us to experience net pleasure.

Otherwise we would be saying "That six day old baby need not want to live a moment longer, because it has already experienced pure pleasure." That would be absurd.

But the same observation applies whether the person is six days old or sixty years old.

Why did these arguments about "pure pleasure" or "limit of pleasure" that can at times seemingly trip us up even arise? Because they are necessary in order to respond to dialectical trickery, for those who for whatever reason need to play that game or respond to it.