

How NOT To Escape Plato's Cave

Post by "Cassius" of February 29, 2020 at 3:25 AM

P.B: Cool. I get the desire to separate Epicurus out from the tranquility nuts, we don't need another Buddha or Zeno, but I don't understand the distinction being made about hedonism. Hedone is the Greek word for pleasure. You used the word pleasure 28 times in the original post. If that's not driving home the centrality of hedone in Epicureanism, I don't know what it is.

Epicurean philosophy is one among several hedonistic philosophies, philosophies that put pleasure as the central focus, pleasurism if you prefer a neologism instead of the baggage hedonism carries in your mind. It carries no negative connotation in mine. To say that there is no Epicurean hedonism is to say that there is no systematic methodology to pleasure seeking in Epicureanism. Isn't that the whole point of Epicureanism? If you're going to deny tranquilism then you've got to embrace something so people can understand what you're selling.

Cassius: P.B., if I understand your post correctly, and I think I do, you are commenting on my reference to hedonism being a word with negative connotations and suggesting that it be embraced. I don't think you and I are far apart in the end, but here is what I would stress:

As far as my own writing goes, I am not interested in playing only to an audience of professional philosophers who are familiar with the technicalities and history of "hedonism." Epicurus taught in his native language, and he taught on a wide variety of topics, of which pleasure was only one of several highly important things. In the minds of normal and ordinary people (and I consider myself and the people who important to me to be "normal and ordinary") hedonism is a word from a foreign language that means an ultimately evil pursuit of immediate bodily pleasures at the expense of all other considerations. For those who do not speak classical Greek it is the equivalent of affixing a label like "Satanist" on an everyday atheist or agnostic. In modern discussion words like that intimidate, shut down discussion, and bury the issues, rather than reveal them. All for nothing, because Epicurean philosophy has far more to say than just commentary on pleasure.

So ultimately I do think that it is necessary to stress "pleasure" - or whatever the equivalent word is in the language we are working. And in fact I think the best immediate indication of whether someone is embracing Epicurus or running from his implications is how quickly and often that they use the word "pleasure." It is amazing to see how many articles and presentations are given about Epicurus than never mention pleasure at all, or which rush to immediately say "Pleasure to Epicurus did not really mean 'pleasure' as we use the word."

So I agree with you, I just dont like to use the untranslated Greek, especially in a form "hedon-ISM" that implies that Epicurus arbitrarily picked a desired result and made all else fit the

result, rather than working out an accurate physics and epistemology, on which he concluded that pleasure is the ethical end, and without which he would never have reached that same conclusion.

So I think that there is a lot of work to be done to make clear "what we're selling." Your comment is exactly on point about the need to invest a lot of work and thought into how to do that and customize the presentation to the audience at hand. That's one of the main purposes of this group and a lot of the online work that a number of us are trying to do, so I hope you and other like-minded people will help us continue and expand that discussion.