

Pleasure: ruminations from sequestration

Post by "Godfrey" of May 5, 2020 at 4:39 PM

From Google:

PLEASURE: a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment.

HAPPY: feeling or showing pleasure or contentment.

I like the circularity of these two definitions. It seems accurate to me.

TRANQUILITY: calm.

Tranquility is something valuable for an Epicurean to strive for. However it is a tool, not a goal. Tranquility allows access to subtleties of sensation, prolepses and feelings, which can lead one to greater wisdom.

MEANING

"They say also that there are two ideas of happiness, complete happiness, such as belongs to a god, which admits of no increase, and the happiness which is concerned with the addition and subtraction of pleasures." Sayings About the Wise Man, Bailey translation

What exactly is godlike happiness and how does a person achieve it? Could it be that "meaningful" pleasures and "general" pleasures are two types of pleasure equal to these two types of happiness in the above quote? I think that we've determined pretty conclusively that pleasure is pleasure. But lately I've been trying to dig deeper into how best to pursue pleasure as my primary goal, and I'm noticing that some pleasures fill my cup fuller than others and that these pleasures seem to involve what I see as meaning. For me, this is a sense of understanding and connection, sometimes to the "big picture." I realized this as I was pondering why some of the things that have motivated me in the past are no longer of interest. Comparing these past pursuits to current interests, the link seemed to be that the strongest desires and pleasures came from activities that gave/give me meaning. This seems pretty obvious. It's also obvious that each person has things which are meaningful specifically to them, so meaning is not a prescription but something to find for oneself, using the Canon, and to act on using the Canon as well.

Part of where this is coming from is my recent condensed reading of Plato's Republic. I was thinking about how the Physics of Epicurus has evolved into the predominantly accepted version of science, while the Canon and Ethics have largely disappeared from the general culture. Why? In propagating "noble lies," Forms and other nonsense, religions and Platonists stole meaning from reality and marginalized any reality-based philosophy. So to compete with religion and Platonism, we need to take back meaning and place it where it belongs, which is in

reality and hence in Epicurean philosophy.

This emphatically does NOT imply that there is a universal meaning: that is incompatible with EP. This refers to the meanings proposed by science, by psychology, by Victor Frankl and others who realized that meaning is individual. I'm suggesting that Epicurus recognized this, and that a major reason why his philosophy thrived for so long and so widely is that it gave people a means and a context in which to find and pursue lives of meaning on their own terms.

As a proselytizing tool, "individually meaningful pleasure" might be more compelling than "pleasure."

At the point of individually choosing which desires to prioritize is where it seems helpful to distinguish between meaningful and general pleasures. Beyond that, pleasure is only measured by the fullness of the cup.

Would this be considered higher and lower pleasures? Is that valid? Does meaning usurp pleasure as the goal in this interpretation? Would pleasures of meaning be natural and necessary pleasures as opposed to vain pleasures? No, because vain pleasures/desires cause more pain than pleasure; "general" ones don't necessarily. Isn't that distinction higher and lower pleasures? But higher and lower is determined by the individual their circumstances, not as a universal.

Caring for a parent or spouse with Alzheimer's is a duty, not a pleasure. It can involve random moments of pleasure. It can also involve love and connection, which give it meaningful pleasure. Is this meaningful pleasure a higher or more godlike pleasure than the random moments of pleasure?