

Managing Expectations In The Study of Epicurus

Post by "Godfrey" of May 8, 2020 at 4:30 PM

In the attempt to fully understand and implement a philosophy, each individual to some degree has a back and forth between the examining the doctrine of the philosophy and examining the conditions of their life with respect to the application of the doctrine. This may be a positive attempt to reach a deeper understanding, a negative attempt to undermine, or anywhere in between.

Regarding the doctrine of EP, there is a tremendous amount of discussion and disagreement about the nature of pleasure (pleasure, ataraxia, absence of pain, etc.). To me, pleasure and pain is the key to implementing the philosophy in one's life, it is the culmination of the Physics and the Canon and it is therefore critical to have a deep understanding of the subject, for which I personally am still striving.

Regarding the practice of EP, specifically with regards to pleasure, there have been a few threads here discussing people's very specific instances of pleasure, and I think that this is helpful to all of us.

Is there a way to examine general frameworks for applying pleasure/pain in our lives without losing sight of the individual nature of experience? Something to bridge the dogma and the specifics. A personal "macro" view to maximize the intelligent pursuit of pleasure. For me as a relative neophyte this seems to be a gap in my understanding. For instance a hedonic regimen is sometimes mentioned, which could be one way of scheduling pleasure into one's life if a person feels that that is useful. A person could also do an evaluation of pains and pleasures in their life as a means to understand for themselves how best to minimize pain and maximize pleasure, if they feel that that is valuable. Perhaps some feel that pleasure is best pursued by following their feelings in the moment. These frameworks would may be different for everybody, but it seems like a fruitful area of discussion and this could be tied in to the texts. Or is this something that everyone needs to do for themselves? I don't know.

One last thought.... Some say that PD 10 contradicts the quote from the letter to Menoecus: *"So when we say that pleasure is the goal, we do not mean the pleasures of decadent people or the enjoyment of sleep, as is believed by those who are ignorant or who don't understand us or who are ill-disposed to us, but to be free from bodily pain and mental disturbance. For a pleasant life is produced not by drinking and endless parties and enjoying boys and women and consuming fish and other delicacies of an extravagant table, but by sober reasoning, searching out the cause of everything we accept or reject, and driving out opinions that cause the greatest trouble in the soul."* I think that DeWitt makes a good case that such a contradiction doesn't exist. Is it possible that discussing our general frameworks for applying pleasure/pain could help to clarify that these two doctrines are in perfect agreement?