

Managing Expectations In The Study of Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of May 8, 2020 at 5:41 PM

Those are good thoughts Godfrey.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

To me, pleasure and pain is the key to implementing the philosophy in one's life

I think in my case I have a special perspective on that which may be the result of my age and background.

For me, I don't generally wrestle with particular "types" of pleasure, or how to implement them - I know I make the same mistakes that most people do in terms of over-indulgence, or just mistaken views of what will lead to more pleasure or more pain down the road.

For me, the issue of "pleasure and pain [as] the key to implementing the philosophy" is more the recognition that "pleasure and pain" are what actually stand in the role of "gods" or "idealism" that I see in other people of my generation.

Maybe the time has come when the issues of eternal life, fate, supernatural gods, divine punishment and reward, etc. are largely obsolete and even uninteresting, but I know in terms of how I have grown up the issues of existence of god, etc, were the main and overriding issues of importance.

So in my case it is such a huge issue to recognize that gods and idealism are false leads, and that natural mechanisms of pleasure and pain take the place of those, that I find Epicurean philosophy fully satisfying without looking to Epicurus for specific hints on particular pleasures to pursue or avoid. Certainly his advice as to friendship and living within one's means are highly useful, but I don't find those particularly unique or Epicurus' version of them to be the central items of interest.

I think people today in our much less religious and more secular society start from a much different point than did those in generations past, so maybe that partly explains why so many people are interesting in "techniques" when it seems to me that they should be asking "*What's the right direction to go in the first place, regardless of technique in getting there?*"

As for the questions about contradictions such as:

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Is it possible that discussing our general frameworks for applying pleasure/pain could help to clarify that these two doctrines are in perfect agreement?

I am thinking that is sort of a result of the same issue. People come to Epicurus thinking that they are going to read about some Stoic "mind manipulation" technique, and instead of that they find a lot of fundamentals about the nature of the universe and humanity that seems to them irrelevant, because they think they have the "end goal" already figured out and they don't need any lectures on that!

Someone you like who are now fully into the issues won't make that mistake, but I can see what you are observing operating as part of the problem we're discussing - people are looking for a "cookbook" of quick and easy suggestions, and instead they hear lectures on issues they didn't even realize existed!

To those kinds of complaints my general response would have to be a diplomatic version of "that's just too bad that you don't understand the questions that you should be asking." 😊 And a certain number of people like that have already equipped themselves with such blinders that there's not much hope for them to become "committed" members of an Epicurean community anyway.

But I do think that a significant percentage of the type of people who come looking for a cookbook will recognize and say to themselves - "*Wait a minute! I never knew these questions existed but I see why they are important!*" And those are the ones that it would be good to be prepared for with some initial guidance about what to expect and why they need to expect it.

As for those of us who do see and understand the issues, we too need the kind of community you're talking about - with practical advice for those of us who do see the deeper issues on how to dig ourselves out of those weeds regularly enough that we don't get overcome by the work required for the larger tasks.