

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2020 at 6:34 AM

The more I read this Aristippus material, and our discussion of it, the more concerned I am about relying on the face value of Diogenes Laertius' interpretations.

Even if we are not seeing the result of DL forcing things into anachronistic / stoic-influenced boxes, as per the criticism in the Nikolosky article, to which they do not belong, I think there is a worse problem.

The fact that both the Cyreniacs and Epicurus identified pleasure rather than wisdom or virtue or holiness as the goal of life is the real point of overwhelming significance. It is the elephant in the room against which all other details fade almost into insignificance.

While the additional details are interesting for us to know, they should not be allowed to take our eye off the main focus and things that ought to always be the main focus. For example, what did the Cyreniacs hold about:

1 = is there an afterlife?

2 = is there a supernatural creator / ruler?

3 = is there an absolute virtue?

4 = what did they teach about the senses and the nature of "truth" and "knowledge" and platonic forms or essences?

5 = is the universe infinite and eternal, is the earth at the center of it, is there life elsewhere including higher beings?

Yes the goal of pleasure would be right up there near the top of this list, and the answers to some of these may exist still, but the answers to these questions will have at least as much practical impact on general view of life and ways to pursue pleasure as will issues such as whether memories are pleasurable.

Of course this is "the Greeks on Pleasure" so the focus is naturally on pleasure, but its still necessary to keep perspective and realize that anyone who dethrones virtue and reason and religion as the goal of life and replaces them with pleasure is already choosing for themselves probably the most critically important marker.