

Elena Nicoli - An Excellent Presentation On Epicurean Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of April 16, 2018 at 11:08 PM

Here are some initial thoughts on questions that might go through minds in the audience listening to this presentation. Are there ways to head off these questions or point the way to the answer in a short talk such as this?

1. All this sounds fine, but why should I accept Epicurus' opinion that a simple life is all I should want out of life? Aren't there more important things than pleasure and pain? Shouldn't I live so that I will go to heaven, and not go to hell? Those things are more important than pleasure and pain aren't they?"
2. Haven't we always been taught that nothing good comes easily? Why should the best part of life be easy to obtain? I see people around me suffering and dying in misery and pain all the time. They didn't find a happy life easy to obtain. Doesn't that show that Epicurus was wrong?
3. I seem to hear you saying that avoidance of pain is the highest goal. Are you really saying that? If so, why shouldn't I avoid all pain by killing myself?
4. Ok, we won't go to extremes like killing ourselves, After all, moderation in all things, right? But I hear you saying that the simplest life is the best. If I really want the best life, shouldn't I go ONLY for bread, water, and a cave to get out of the weather? That would be the purest application of Epicurus, wouldn't it?
5. Did I hear you say that we should never want power? I live in a pretty bad neighborhood, and the people in the country next door are talking about invading our country. Right about now I would really like the power to put the criminals in jail and the power to stop the invaders before they burn my house. How can that be wrong - but you said I should NEVER seek power?
6. OK now I hear you saying that "static" pleasure is the best kind of pleasure, and that comes from absence of pain and not from the senses. But then you've also said that static pleasure "feels good." Are you trying to have it both ways? If the best kind of pleasure feels good, then I understand what you mean? But what kind of pleasure is worth having that I can't feel?
7. You say that your version of the pleasurable life can be satisfied, but that people who chase sensual pleasure can never satisfy their quest. Well tell me, then, how much time do I need to satisfy your definition of a pleasurable life? Can I take enough pain pills til I feel no pain, lie down in my bed, and stay there til I stop breathing from an overdose? If I've reached that state of total painlessness, there really isn't anything more for me in Epicurean theory is there? Why should I be concerned if I die tonight from an overdose? I won't feel any pain at all, and I'll feel "high" on the way there, so isn't that what you are

telling me is the best way of life?

8. I have heard that Epicurus also said "There is also a limit in simple living, and he who fails to understand this falls into an error as great as that of the man who gives way to extravagance. (VS 63)" How do you reconcile that statement with the view that the simplest life is the best life?

[Reminder - no criticism of the original presentation is expressed or implied! This is purely an exercise to consider how we might ourselves present Epicurean ideas to our friends or to small audiences - and at the same time the exercise will help us consider our own understanding of the philosophy!!]