

"Facts don't care about your feelings."

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2020 at 10:53 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus wasn't saying our feelings determine facts, right? We still gather objective facts about reality through our senses and mental capacity and judge our reaction to it by pleasure and pain. Is that it? Because if it's "going with your gut" and "truthiness", Aristotle is winking at me over here.

Of course he wasn't saying that your feelings about the bullet coming at your head will determine how it impacts you. And he wasn't saying that you can force yourself to be "indifferent" about it and thereby escape the effects of it.

The first comment that comes to mind is that you wouldn't be concerned about the argument that the nose determines how something smells and not the eyes or the ears. It seems pretty obvious to accept that these faculties have domains of their own in which they are supreme, and cannot be overridden by the other faculties. In general, how something smells to you can't be changed by showing you pictures of different things or telling you that you should smell it differently.

It seems to me that the point that Epicurus was making was that pleasure and pain are entitled to the same respect as the nose or the eyes. What they tell you is a primary connection between you and reality and there's no second-guessing it. You can tell yourself that you don't find the pin sticking in your finger painful, but if it feels painful it feels painful.

And a second point that he was making is that since there is no god and no absolute reference point to tell you what is worthwhile and what isn't, then pleasure and pain are in fact the only criteria given by Nature to determine what to pursue and what to avoid. But just like the eyes and ears, the sense of pleasure and pain only gives you input about the "now," and it's up to you to use all your faculties plus your intelligence to make a decision on how you want to proceed over time. In fact you might choose to decide that the particular pleasure and pain is so great that you want to make a decision that will permanently alter or even end your life in exchange for a short-term pleasure or avoidance of pain, but in the end the pleasure and pain should remain primary, because in nature those other standards that Aristotle pushes (god, virtue based on what others do,...) are arbitrary assertions with no evidence to establish that they have any reality outside his assertion that they exist.

I can't recall if we've discussed that "facts don't care about your feelings" statement but I have seen it too and I think it does require analysis.

In one sense it is true - the fact of the bullet striking your head will kill you regardless of how you "feel" about it emotionally."

But in another sense it is very wrong, in that your feelings of pleasure and pain are of primary importance to you, and what other people are asserting as "facts" may truly not be of significance to you at all. Where I see that phrase used most often is in political debates where in truth the "fact" being asserted may not be "true" at all, but rather an assertion of a generalization which may not apply directly to the people involved at all.

It looks to me like once again we have another issue of ambiguity of words. What we're really talking about in the canonical analysis is the "feeling of pleasure and pain" which seems to have been reduced to "pleasure" and "pain" in the texts. It seems to me that "feelings" in this context most properly refers to "reactions" as I have seen you discuss yourself. (The word is a variation of "pathe," right?) What Epicurus was really doing was looking for a general word that describes the combination of all types of pleasure and pain in a way that describes "how it moves us" rather than simply subjectively how we might choose to view something at a particular moment.

So here again part of my comment is that what we need to be doing in philosophy is realizing that we aren't talking biology or physiology. We aren't looking for (because it's not possible) a precise medical terminology description of a bodily phenomena. We're looking instead for a series of words that provide an outline description of the general issues involved by which we can organize our thoughts. And we're not doing that in a vacuum, but in a context in which there are competing philosophies and religions that tell us to organize our thoughts in totally different ways -- ways that it appears to Epicurus are disastrously inconsistent with the true nature of things and the true goal for life set by nature.

So in the end maybe the bottom line is that when considering that maybe Aristotle or Plato or some other philosophy or modern scientific viewpoint is better, it's important to make sure you're not comparing apples to oranges. If you have Covid19 then you need a medical doctor who is familiar with the latest science on what works and what doesn't, and you need a set of medications - not a high-level philosophy of life.

But if you're at one of those many points in life where you can go in different directions and you're wondering what paths to choose and how to avoid errors of all sorts, then you don't need a medical doctor to prescribe you Xanax or tell you that you need glasses or a hearing aid. You need a high-level philosophy of life that is going to address what options you have and give you way to analyze what choices you should conclude to be best for you to take.

It's awfully easy for people who have already committed to another direction to play word games with people who aren't experienced in these issues, and convince people that they (these competing philosophers) have a better idea about which path to take. Words can be very seductive and it's important to be grounded in the nature of reality, but at the same time neither Xanax nor Remdesivir are going to tell you how to live your life. "Feelings" and "divinity" and "truth" and "reality" all have levels of meaning that apply differently in different contexts,

and there's no avoiding that. if they DIDN'T have those contextual differences, then Plato and Aristotle would be right -- there would absolute truth that applies the same to everyone everywhere and in the same way. But an absolute reality that applies to everyone at all times and all places is exactly what they are trying to persuade you of with their ideal forms and essences.

But in contrast to that evidence shows us that the events of life are contextual. "Feelings" are part of that context, but in the end there are also realities that don't depend on how we feel about them, so there's no way around dealing with and understanding the nature of things.

At least that's my first stab at approaching your comments.