

Interpretation of pursuit of pleasure

Post by “waterholic” of December 8, 2023 at 1:51 AM

I sense that there is a fundamental difference in the Epicurean and stoic definitions of telos - the appropriate pursuit.

The former is an observation, not a normative statement. We cannot stop aiming for pleasure. It is built in. So the statement is not "People should pursue pleasure", but rather "People pursue pleasure". This is done.

The latter is a normative statement: "people should pursue virtue". To my knowledge there is no stoic argument that virtue is innate in people. It may be a form of a divine pursuit, but stoics would probably argue that there are people who are not virtuous. From the Epicurean perspective, there cannot be people who do not pursue pleasure.

So as an Epicurean then, one's advice should be "ignore whatever is imposed by false divine virtues and be yourself, follow your judgement". No need to "pursue pleasure", since you already do it.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 8, 2023 at 2:25 AM

Well said! The only thing I would add is regarding the final sentence. Your sentence as written follows logically from your observations, but for further clarity I would say that both pleasure and pain are guides. So to live our best lives we need to continually practice being aware of our pleasures and pains in order to obtain maximum information. From this information we can more skillfully make our choices and rejections which will maximize pleasure.

So yes, we naturally pursue pleasure, but not always skillfully. The task of increasing our skill of understanding and following the feelings as guides could reasonably be considered pursuing pleasure.

This path is following "the nature of things". The Stoic path seems to be following a mental construct. They say, I think, that almost nobody is virtuous.

Post by “waterholic” of December 8, 2023 at 4:32 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

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Thank you [Godfrey](#) this is a great elaboration. Exactly right: we can proactively improve our "wellbeing" by improving our understanding, OR we can make life harder by following a "mental construct" only to get frustrated by how unattainable and unreal it is.