

On the associations between Virtue and Pleasure and my Epicurean Write up

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of March 27, 2018 at 4:43 AM

Hello all, just came here from the FB group, was going to write this over there but we seem to moving to this forum so I'll write it here.

I wanted to discuss why Epicureans (and most Hedonists such as John Stuart Mill) regard Virtue so highly in their hedonistic philosophy. A virtue, is a character trait that is seem as positive, how do we know it's positive? Well we Epicureans know that it's a positive character trait because they lead to pleasure, when you are generous it feels good, when you are prudent with your choices you avoid a pain or gain a please. How do Stoics know why Virtue is good? I dunno, Zeus I guess.

Pleasure is our highest goal, specifically a pleasurable life. Epicureans aren't too worried about having one massive pleasure once a month then living 29 days of pain, they are concerned with pleasurable living, a life style. So because of this goal, pleasure and pain are tools on what to avoid and what to accept e.g. eating feels good when hungry and it removes a pain but eating too much can cause problems, so eat in moderation for a pleasurable life (virtue of Prudence, again we know this is good because it leads to a pleasurable life).

What other virtues are good for an Epicurean and why, well Justice. Not because of some divine law which is handed down to us from God or Zeus but rather because it allows everyone to pursue a pleasurable life without harming one another. We abide by the laws of the country because people who harm others get punished and therefore are deterred from interfering with others happiness. Endurance is also a good because sometimes we must accept a pain for a later pleasure.

Are some pleasures higher or lower than others in Epicureanism? Well, friendship is seen as the highest way to live pleurably so it seems that there is some ranking system for pleasures.

Overall that is where my Epicurean philosophy is at right now, and my understanding of Virtue. Looking forward to chatting with you all on this forum.

Post by “Cassius” of March 27, 2018 at 7:56 AM

Eoghan thank you for that post! First, as you'll probably see at the moment we have a much smaller subscriber base here than Facebook, so you might want to post both places. However this is the place where I intend to focus my activity and work to build a real community. As you are around longer in the Facebook group you will see what I mean. It is good for "advertising" but not so much for long-term closeness on the goal of Epicurean philosophy.

You seem very serious about this so let me repeat my recommendation of that Nikolsky and Wenham articles (which are posted here in the Files section) <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/filebase/> I have tried to place the main articles here, but for someone who is REALLY interested in the background, there's no substitute for the full Gosling & Taylor "Greeks On Pleasure." But the articles here are a good start.

One specific on your post: I think "Friendship" is an example of the cliché "hard cases make bad law." Yes, the doctrine means just what it says, that Friendship is among the most productive tools for pleasurable living, right at or near the top. But I think if you drill down in "On Ends" and in Diogenes Laertius you will see that Epicurus himself was always very rigorous to observe that tools are only TOOLS, and that tools should never be confused with pleasure itself. If one allows an exception to that rule then you do indeed fall into the trap of ranking tools AS IF they were pleasures themselves, and you end up with hard and fast rules about what TOOLS you should ALWAYS to pursue, instead of keeping your eye on the ball that in an atomistic, undetermined, godless universe, there are never going to be 100% hard and fast choices that guarantee particular results. Sometimes even friendship will fall away if the goal of pleasurable living is to be honored. Sometimes we will even die for a friend, but if the friend is lost and tells us to walk away to save ourselves, it is not necessarily the "right" thing to do to die with the friend. A totality of circumstances, not an abstract principle that friendship is an end in itself, must dictate the result.

Thank you again for posting!