

Health of the Body and Happiness of the Soul -vs- "The Goal is Pleasure"

Post by "Kalosyni" of June 4, 2024 at 1:34 PM

I have posted below the text from the slides that I presented at the beginning of the last night's Zoom meeting before we jumped into the discussion. I wanted to add that my original direction that I wanted to take this discussion was that I wanted to present the idea that: **to live as Epicureans we need to get more clear about what our life goal is.** Here I mean "goal" in a philosophical sense, not in getting a good career or marriage and family (these could be thought of as a means but not an end). The goal we hold in our mind becomes a kind of "canon" for how we make decisions.

I think that it isn't enough to say: "I want to be happy" (what exactly is happiness? and how would you know that you are happy?, and the word is often taken to refer to a feeling that comes and goes...but we've discussed this aspect before, lol). And also I feel strongly that it isn't enough to say "Pleasure is the goal" -- especially because the word "pleasure" doesn't capture the full meaning that Epicurus presented, and the word is too vague.

Please note: I have added new additional comments with brackets and asterisks.

Slide 1:

Discussion Topic: The basis and methods for making choices and avoidances.

1. What is our starting point?

There is only this one life:

"We are born once and there can be no second birth. For all eternity we shall no longer be." (excerpt from VS14)

2. What is our goal?

We need to be clear about what our goal is:

"You must reflect on the fundamental goal and everything that is clear, to which opinions are referred; if you do not, all will be full of trouble and confusion." ([PD22](#))

[If you are not clear about your goal, not only the possibility of being "full of trouble and confusion", but you will not reach your goal, and may feel dissatisfaction or anxiety.]

Slide 2:

What is our goal? (continued)

Excerpt from the Wall of Diogenes of Oinoanda:

"If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end."

[This is often cited as one source for understanding the goal as pleasure. However, as I wrote above, that it isn't clear and specific enough, so it will lead to problems.]

Slide 3:

What might help us make the best choices and avoidances?

The Letter to Menoeceus gives some guidance on this:

"The right understanding of these facts enables us to refer all choice and avoidance to the health of the body and (the soul's) freedom from disturbance, since this is the aim of the life of blessedness." (Bailey translation, excerpt).

[This is stating a very clear goal: "the health of the body and a mind free from mental disturbance". Synonyms for disturbance are agitation, turmoil, uproar]

And from the Wall of Diogenes of Oinoanda:

"...observing that most people suffer from false notions about things and do not listen to the body] when it brings important and just [accusations] against the soul, alleging that it is unwarrantably mauled and maltreated by the soul and dragged to things which are not necessary (in fact, the wants of the body are small and easy to obtain — and the soul too can live well by sharing in their enjoyment — while those of the soul are both great and difficult to obtain and, besides being of no benefit to our nature, actually involve dangers)."

[This points to avoiding things that are risky and might end in premature death.]

Slide 4:

We must understand the nature of our desires, and to what ends they are pointing us.

--Are we wanting something because we believe it is necessary to sustain the life of the body or that it can maintain the health of the body?

--Are we wanting something because we believe it will bring us relief from stress or fear, or bring clarity or joy, so as to bring about or maintain our mental well-being?

--"Pleasure as variation" when pleasure can no longer be increased but only varied, can be seen as natural but unnecessary, and we may decide that we will wait to pursue that until we have made sure that the other two categories (health and mental well-being) are satisfied.

--Also, it is important to evaluate situations so we can avoid creating a painful or unwanted end result.

--Unnatural and unnecessary - "groundless opinion" - these do not bring joy or pleasure, and they also cause distress, because they are difficult to achieve and bring painful consequences.

Slide 5:

"Pleasure as variation" is not the path ****[to a healthy body and a mind free from disturbance]**** as we see here in this Letter to Menoecus excerpt:

"When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind."

Seen here is the importance of "searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, by using sober reasoning".

[132]" For it is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit."

Slide 6:

****[There is the philosophical goal and basis and then there is the application of it to specific situations -- your choices will flow out of your basis. The quality of one's life will depend upon making wise choices and wise decisions.]****

One could ask these questions when evaluating a given situation:

"What am I wanting in this situation?" -- clearly describing what specific "doable" outcome you want (not an abstraction).

"Why am I wanting it?" -- for what purpose: health of the body? mental well-being? the enjoyment of variation?

From Wikipedia: In [psychology](#), **decision making** is regarded as the [cognitive process](#) resulting in the selection of a belief or a course of action among several possible alternative options. It could be either [rational](#) or irrational. The decision-making process is a reasoning process based on assumptions of [values](#), [preferences](#) and beliefs of the decision-maker.

Every decision-making process produces a final [choice](#), which may or may not prompt action.

Research about decision-making is also published under the label [problem solving](#), particularly in European [psychological research](#).

(End of Slide Presentation)

And some further reference material (which was not shown in a slide last night):

Letter to Menoecus (Bailey translation)

We must consider that of desires some are natural, others vain, and of the natural some are necessary and others merely natural; and of the necessary some are necessary for happiness, others for the repose of the body, and others for very life.

[128] **The right understanding of these facts enables us to refer all choice and avoidance to the health of the body and (the soul's) freedom from disturbance, since this is the aim of the life of blessedness.** For it is to obtain this end that we always act, namely, to avoid pain and fear. And when this is once secured for us, all the tempest of the soul is dispersed, since the living creature has not to wander as though in search of something that is missing, and to look for some other thing by which he can fulfill the good of the soul and the good of the body. For it is then that we have need of pleasure, when we feel pain owing to the absence of pleasure; (but when we do not feel pain), we no longer need pleasure.

[129] And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.

And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided.

[130] Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 4, 2024 at 7:16 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

to live as Epicureans we need to get more clear about what our life goal is. Here I mean "goal" in a philosophical sense, not in getting a good career or marriage and family (these could be thought of as a means but not an end). The goal we hold in our mind becomes a kind of "canon" for how we make decisions.

We need an internal personal "measuring stick" with which to determine what to choose and what to reject (avoid), and this will come out of our individual definition of "pleasure". (Edit note: 06/07/24 - I added a few more words to this paragraph to increase clarity).

(Read about Don's recent recommendation to use the word "reject" vs "avoid" [here](#)).

This "measuring stick" isn't a absolute rule, but it is a very helpful guide.

We naturally move toward pleasure, but we can make a quick decision to avoid a particular pleasure (and here when I say "pleasure", I mean objects of potential pleasant and pleasurable sensation -- we can choose to avoid it if we either guess, or know from experience or from someone else's advice that it will result in physical pain, physical illness, or death, or mental agitation or mental turmoil.

Our end goal is health of the body, and freedom from mental turmoil of the mind -- because where pain is not, there is a pleasant and pleasurable state of existence, and a blessedness.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 4, 2024 at 9:11 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

And from the Wall of Diogenes of Oinoanda:

"...observing that most people suffer from false notions about things and do not listen to the body] when it brings important and just [accusations] against the soul, alleging that it is unwarrantably mauled and maltreated by the soul and dragged to things which are not necessary (in fact, the wants of the body are small and easy to obtain — and the soul too can live well by sharing in their enjoyment — while those of the soul

are both great and difficult to obtain and, besides being of no benefit to our nature, actually involve dangers)."

This I find to be interesting because it is pointing to the needs of the body as being primary. And the way that I read this it could be hinting at what is the "unnatural and unnecessary" category -- and that the mind (soul) is what creates all sorts of whims to chase after (such as prestige and power, etc) which could end up with bad consequences.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 8, 2024 at 9:16 PM

This thread was based on some slides made for a First Monday Zoom back in June. It was an attempt to emphasize the abstract rather than the specific.

It says in the Letter to Menoecus:

"The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject in terms of the health of the body and the serenity of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life."

So my intention was to highlight the importance of prioritizing the health of the body and happiness of the soul. If we only say "pleasure is the goal" it isn't going produce the same results as prioritizing the health of the body and the happiness of the soul.

Some people may want to discuss this philosophical conundrum (will this lead to "too much tranquility"?).

Post by “Cassius” of September 9, 2024 at 6:56 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Some people may want to discuss this philosophical conundrum (will this lead to "too much tranquility"?).

I consider Olympic athletes in particular but also all who make the effort to stay in good physical condition to exhibit "health of the body," and I consider normally active people (especially the young but possible at any age) pursuing active joyful lives to exhibit "happiness of the soul," so no I don't see any reason why such goals would lead to "too much tranquility." When pleasure is seen as everything that is not in pain, such the Epicurean view of your hand

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3889-health-of-the-body-and-happiness-of-the-soul-vs-the-goal-is-pleasure/>

in its normal condition, "Tranquility" is just one of many types of health of the mind and body.