

Considering the Importance of Mental Pleasures

Post by "Cassius" of May 29, 2018 at 1:48 PM

I started to post this privately but decided it might be of general interest - it is a suggestion to Eoghan for his new Epicurean blog: Eoghan since you are attacking some of the most fundamental issues from a fresh perspective, here is one that I would appreciate your keeping in mind - from On Ends:

"(3) Yet we maintain that this does not preclude mental pleasures and pains from being much more intense than those of the body; since the body can feel only what is present to it at the moment, whereas the mind is also cognizant of the past and of the future. For granting that pain of body is equally painful, yet our sensation of pain can be enormously increased by the belief that some evil of unlimited magnitude and duration threatens to befall us hereafter. And the same consideration may be transferred to pleasure: a pleasure is greater if not accompanied by any apprehension of evil. This therefore clearly appears, that intense mental pleasure or distress contributes more to our happiness or misery than a bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration."

Here's why: Aside from the terrible tendency to dismiss the physics and the canonics, which we've also been discussing lately, I think there is far too little attention given to the meaning of "pleasure." I would wager that 80% of the people even in this group, and 99% of people out of it, think of purely physical sensations when they think of pleasure. For example, they think about such things as Lucretius' Example of lounging in the grass with friends at the side of a river. But if the record from Torquatus is correct, as I think it is, then Epicurus himself stressed mental pleasure in his own life, such as when he valued the company of his fellow schoolmembers more than the pain of his physical problems on the last day of his life. And if mental pleasures are even more varied than physical pleasures (which I also think is clear) then far from focusing on "grazing in the grass" on the side of a river, our example is more like that of Epicurus himself, in which it is least as pleasurable, if not more pleasurable, to help lead or participate in a worldwide philosophical revolution.

Which is not to say that we need to do the impossible of converting everyone into being a friend, but that as Epicurus said we live the life closest to being "gods among men" when we focus our attention on those things that are eternally true, and how we fit as individuals fit into them.

Post by "Hiram" of May 30, 2018 at 10:33 AM

More sources on this are cited in my essays on Diogenes' Wall. PD 20 displays a mind-over-matter logic that makes it clear that the mind is the agent that must understand the limits of pleasure and pain for the flesh, and that one must train the mind in this understanding. Later, Diogenes adds detail to this by encouraging people to sow seeds of pleasure with their choices and avoidances that will bear fruit both in the present and future, which creates an interesting concept in the art of living of "doing favors to our future self" (including the extirpation of dis-eased emotions), to increase our sense of confidence and hope (as E also says in one of the Vatican Sayings--we must make what is ahead better than what is behind us). We end up with a kind of mastery over our minds, our desires, and our selves, that is very different from the self-tyranny of ascetic ideals.

[Diogenes' Wall: on Principal Doctrine 20](#)

Quote

The flesh receives as unlimited the limits of pleasure; and to provide it requires unlimited time. But the mind, intellectually grasping what the end and limit of the flesh is, and banishing the terrors of the future, procures a complete and perfect life, and we have no longer any need of unlimited time. Nevertheless the mind does not shun pleasure, and even when circumstances make death imminent, the mind does not lack enjoyment of the best life. - [Principal Doctrine 20](#)

<https://theautarkist.wordpress.com/2017/03/31/dio...al-doctrine-20/>

and

[Diogenes' Wall: on the Pleasures](#)

Quote

... [let us] not [avoid every pain that is present, and let us not choose every pleasure, as the many always do. Each person must employ reasoning,] since he [will not always achieve immediate success: just as] exertion (?) [often] involves one [gain at the beginning and] certain [others as time passes by], so it is also with [experiencing pleasure;] for sowings of seeds do [not] bring [the same benefit] to the sower but we see some seeds very quickly germinating [and bearing fruit and others taking longer] of pleasures and [pains] [pleasure].

Let us now [investigate] how life is to be made pleasant for us both in states and in actions.

Let us first discuss states, keeping an eye on the point that, **when the emotions which disturb the soul are removed, those which produce pleasure enter into it to take their place.**

Well, what are the disturbing emotions? [They are] fears —of the gods, of death, and of [pains]— and, besides [these], desires that [outrun] the limits fixed by nature. **These are the roots of all evils, and, [unless] we cut them off, [a multitude] of evils will grow [upon] us.**

Post by “Cassius” of May 30, 2018 at 2:09 PM

Here are two other comments relevant to this topic:

"Do you all agree with Epicurean philosophy has life should be filled with as much pleasurable and the least amount of suffering (including causing any harm to anyone else).? Do any of you have objections to that?" It's not clear to me whether there is one part or another in there on which you are focusing, but as you get to the end I think you are perhaps implying an overbroad conclusion. Staying with the question of what did Epicurus teach, as opposed to what we think is correct ourselves, Epicurus clearly taught that sometimes we will embrace pain when that leads to greater pleasure or lesser total pain, so it's necessary to point out that there's no single "best" way in real life to handle the competing motivations (pleasure and pain). I would say sure, as Blanton said, that causing pain to others is generally painful for

ourselves, but that doesn't mean we are not going to do it when the occasion requires, just as we choose pain ourselves when the occasion requires.

Having stated that pleasure should be maximized and pain minimized in the way you have stated it, have you really answered anything in terms of a preferred set of practical choices?

I am not sure that you have, nor do I think that Epicurus saw his philosophy that way either.

I think your question is excellent for illustrating something we all need to deal with - having observed that pleasure is desirable and pain is undesirable, can we stop at that point and think that we have a solution to anything?

I think not.

When Epicurus observed that (1) true gods would show no favor or anger, and (2) that death is the end of our consciousness, did he STOP and say - that's all you need to know?

Post by "Cassius" of May 30, 2018 at 2:09 PM

Just to continue the thought while I am able, here is part of where I am going: Unless I am the only one doing this (and I don't think I am) we today tend to see the word pleasure and equate it with things like "lounging in the hammock" (nearby photo) or the usual physical pleasures either simple or sex/drugs/rock'n'roll. I think we do that because we are attuned to the stoic/christian/majority framework that pleasures in general are disreputable and physical pleasures are especially ignoble. We think that's the only issue, so we think "a life of simple pleasures" is the ultimate issue, and that is the main thing Epicurus was trying to tell us.

But when Epicurus was telling us that true gods don't show favor or anger, is that all he was saying?

When Epicurus was saying that death is the end of consciousness, is that all he was saying?

I don't think so.

I think he's pointing the way to an entirely new way of thinking with those as the STARTING points, not the end points at all.

And in regard to "pleasure" was he talking about bread and water or wine and cheese or even luxury items?

I don't think so either. I think that the STARTING point of the analysis is simply that the "faculty of pleasure" is the superior parallel to the framework of gods and ideal virtue. We aren't

supposed to focus on particular pleasures any more than we should spend our time whether Allah might not be god, but Yahweh might be, or absent those Zeus or Diana might be gods. Or whether the ideal of justice might not be true, but the ideal of equality or democracy or "everyone is precious in the sight of god" or "we're all brothers" might be true.

We're supposed to break entirely out of the framework of giving ANY credibility to gods, or ANY credibility to ideal forms, and realize that it is the natural faculty of pleasure that takes the place of all of those, and which serves as the true "guide" without at any point having any interim or final destination in mind. The faculty of pleasure can serve as the guide in 2000 BC Africa just as well as it can serve as the guide in a 2100 Mars Colony or a 2500 colony in another galaxy.

By focusing exclusively on particular pleasures we limit our scope and horizon to the lowest possible common denominator. We see the trees and the leaves and the bushes, but we never grasp the full forest. What we really should be doing is examining the full implications of the fact that Nature has not given a god to rule over us or ideal forms to which to conform. What nature has given instead is a faculty to look to as we rule ourselves, and by which we can decide how high or how low we ourselves choose to go. Pleasure isn't a set of concretes, it is better thought of, as Lucretius suggested in book one, in allegory as reality's own "divine goddess" that supercedes all lower and false concepts of gods and abstract ideal forms.