

If You're Looking For Happiness You're Well On Your Way to Being An Epicurean

Post by "Cassius" of September 30, 2018 at 8:02 PM

If you've come to this group because you're looking for help in living a happy life, rather than a way to "please god" or "be a good person," then let's be clear, you're already well on your way to being an Epicurean and leaving Stoicism and Supernatural religion. That's because no one shows that the ultimate end of life is "pleasure," and that any other goal is error and leads to nothing but confusion, better than Epicurus, the master-builder of human happiness:

"So we must exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything, and, if that be absent, all our actions are directed towards attaining it." - Letter to Menoecus

[PD22](#). "We must consider both the ultimate end and all clear sensory evidence, to which we refer our opinions; for otherwise everything will be full of uncertainty and confusion."

"...I will give you a complete account of the system, and expound the actual teachings of the great explorer of the truth, the master-builder of human happiness." -- Torquatus/Cicero in "On Ends"

And why do I put "pleasure" in quotes? Because we're not talking only about sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll (although those ARE pleasant). If you study Epicurus you will see that the word must be broadly understood, to include all kinds of mental and physical pleasures - with the common theme that whether it be the finest work of art or the simplest food, things that are pleasant are united by nature - not by god and not by abstract reasoning - due to the fact that our **senses** perceive the thing as pleasurable. No need for priests bribe us with false promises or threaten us with hell, no need for academicians to confuse us with endless words that lead nowhere.

Comment:

I suggest that you should put up an FAQ or list of common errors about Epicureanism, since the same things seem to come up repeatedly. For instance, I thought some pleasures were disdained as they caused more pain, right?

Cassius: No - All pleasures are pleasurable - but some pleasures lead to more pain than they are worth. But you don't know that because some pleasures are intrinsically "bad" - you only know that due to the contextual result of the pain being worse than the pleasure is worth to

you. And if you make the error of thinking that some pleasures are bad in themselves, then you've set up a false abstract standard higher than pleasure, and Epicurean philosophy denies any such thing exists.

This is so canonical that it is in the top ten: PD8 "No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves."

Comment: Right, that's what I thought.

For others reading this it is crucial that this not be dismissed as playing with words. As [PD10](#) says, even the activities that we consider to be most "depraved" are bad not because they are not pleasurable, but because in virtually every case they bring painful consequences that outweigh the pleasure. To accept that there is some outside standard that says "XXX pleasure is always bad" would be to accept some kind of supernatural or ideal abstraction which the nature of the universe as infinite, eternal, and uncreated renders impossible.

Comment: It seems that's exactly why so many people have a difficulty understanding this. The idea of such values has been ingrained deeply in Western culture by Christian doctrine. Epicureanism thus seems very alien to them, and they try squeezing it into the same mold (although this makes no sense).