

Happy Twentieth of October 2018!

Post by “Cassius” of October 20, 2018 at 12:16 AM

For this Twentieth I would like to return to a recurring theme – that of restating what I see to be some of the most important take-away implications of Epicurean philosophy. I firmly believe that each one of us has an individual context, which means that we will reach individual and differing conclusions about how we will best pursue and secure our own happiness. However, as we consider and select from among the options available to us, there are important fundamental premises found in the Principles Doctrines of Epicurus which must always be applied. Here are a few:

1 – There are NO supernatural gods creating or supervising universes, or controlling our lives. Among the many reasons we can be sure of that is that any being truly worthy of the name “god” would have no more time for game-playing with humans than we humans have time for game-playing with ants.

2 – This life is our only chance to experience whatever pleasures we wish to experience. All evidence tells us that when we die our personalities and consciousnesses cease to exist, just as do the personalities and consciousnesses of our most beloved dogs or cats. No one expects any other animal’s consciousness to survive death, nor should we expect our own. We only live once, and death is forever afterward, so we should spend our time the best way we can and never procrastinate.

3- Idealism is as false a god as Allah or Yahweh or Jesus or “Humanity.” No matter how important our ideals are to us, we are ourselves totally irrelevant to our ideals. No ideal is keeping score and giving us credit for our work in this life so that we can be rewarded in a future life. What Nature gave us as a guide and goal is not idealism but pleasure – pleasure of all kinds – mental and physical. If we aren’t measuring all our choices according to whether those choices will maximize long-term net pleasure over pain then we are chasing an illusion and will catch only bitter disillusion and disappointment.

4 – Pain holds no more magical power over us than Lucifer or Satan or any fictionalized devil. All of life requires exertion in order to achieve the pleasure we want before we die, but if we order our lives reasonably we can in most cases (not ALL cases, because there are no guarantees in life – no fate or supervising gods!) we can expect the pain we encounter to be manageable. Nor need we fear the unmanageable pain, because if extreme that pain will be short, and death will end it for us.

5 – “Virtue” has no more absolute substance than does Yahweh or Allah or idealism. The achievement of pleasure in life requires that we act in ways that are most likely to deflect our challenges and enemies, and to elicit positive pleasurable responses in our friends. Those

actions which are successful in achieving that goal can in retrospect be seen to be “virtuous,” and those which in retrospect were counterproductive can be seen to be “unvirtuous.” But that is the only way to judge between the two categories – the success or failure in achieving net pleasurable living is the only standard by which categories like “virtuous” have any meaning.

6 – Since the measure of an action is the result, and the measure is not a false standard of “absolute virtue,” and since pleasure has meaning only to the living, ANY choice or avoidance which secures our lives and protection from our enemies is naturally good. The label of “naturally good” comes only from the result in protecting us, not because it conforms to some idealistic notion of being a “good person.”

7 – Fame and status are no more intrinsically good than are obscurity and living unknown. The test of all our actions is what will result from selecting them, and either fame or obscurity (or both at different times and circumstances) can be employed according to the result that they bring in terms of our individual happiness.

8 – No pleasure is intrinsically “evil” or intrinsically “good.” NO pleasure. NONE AT ALL! Not one single pleasure no matter how perverted your imagination is “intrinsically” bad or good in and of itself. That conclusion is the clear and unavoidable corollary of the observation that there is no god and no universal absolute standard by which intrinsic labels can be affixed. All pleasure is pleasurable, and the test is not whether we think the pleasure makes us a good person, but whether engaging in that pleasure brings us more pain in the long run than is worthwhile to us. Merely stating this or reading this can make uncontrollable shivers run down the spine of those who conform to the standards of majority morality. Worse yet, some people will want to clench their fists and beat you over the head – or worse. But get used to understanding this if you’re going to be an Epicurean – and realize that your sentimentalities will never create the god or the absolute standard that could alone justify a label of something being “intrinsically” evil.

9 – There are many reasons not to overindulge yourself in a single type of pleasure, not the least of which is that to do so would be impossible in the real world, and any effort to do so would guarantee a short lifespan and nasty death. But realize too that if you could immerse your full experience in a single pleasure, you would be denying yourself the experience of many other desirable pleasures. Nature gave you a sensory capacity to perceive innumerable types of physical and mental pleasures – she didn’t give you a handwritten list and a command to pursue only one or even just a few.

10 – Remember that no matter how much you may personally despise certain people or ideas or things, none of them are by nature “evil” or “despicable” or “bad” or “wrong.” All living things are commissioned by Nature to pursue pleasure as they are constituted. Dogs are despicable in the eyes of cats, and cats are loathsome in the eyes of dogs, but both cats and dogs, and all other forms of conscious life, are produced and justified by nature in pursuing their own forms of pleasure. At the highest level of analysis it is only pleasure that is desirable and pain that is undesirable. Just as we ourselves do (or should!) claim the right to pursue the best mix of the two for ourselves, all living things were born by nature to do the same. And that

is what they will continue to do so – and in the case of humans that is what they will do unless and until they are perverted by false philosophies! Count on that being a case, and learn from observing nature. If you're a cat don't plan to surround yourself indiscriminately with dogs. If you're a cat enjoy being with dogs that are friendly, but be extremely careful about which dogs are in fact your friends.

That's all I have time for this Twentieth. Strap on your shields, join together with your friends, and fight for your happiness!

As Seneca recorded: Sic fac omnia tamquam spectet Epicurus! So do all things as though watching were Epicurus!

And as Philodemus wrote: "I will be faithful to Epicurus, according to whom it has been my choice to live."



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