

PD05 - Visualizing Principal Doctrine Five

It is not possible to live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably, and justly. Nor can one live wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. But those who for any reason do not live wisely, honorably, and justly cannot possibly live pleasantly.

- Epicurus Principal Doctrine 5



****Visualizing Principal Doctrine 5**** This doctrine is commonly cited by those who wish to equate Epicurus with Stoicism, and to argue that both are essentially the same because they value "virtue." The text is: **"It is not possible to live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably, and justly. Nor can one live wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. But those who for any reason do not live wisely, honorably, and justly cannot possibly live pleasantly."**

If we look at the full context, however, we see how living virtuously fits in with every other aspect of Epicurean ethical doctrine, as a tool for the achievement of pleasurable living. This is the wider explanation and full application of the doctrine as provided by Torquatus in Cicero's "On Ends":

"Here is indeed a royal road to happiness — open, simple, and direct! For clearly man can have no greater good than complete freedom from pain and sorrow coupled with the enjoyment of the highest bodily and mental pleasures. Notice then how the theory embraces every possible enhancement of life, every aid to the attainment of that Chief Good which is our object."

Epicurus, the man whom you denounce as a voluptuary, cries aloud that no one can live pleasantly without living wisely, honourably and justly, and no one wisely, honourably and justly without living pleasantly.

For a city rent by faction cannot prosper, nor a house whose masters are at strife; much less then can a mind divided against itself and filled with inward discord taste any particle of pure and liberal pleasure. But one who is perpetually swayed by conflicting and incompatible counsels and desires can know no peace or calm. Why, if the pleasantness of life is diminished by the more serious bodily diseases, how much more must it be diminished by the diseases of the mind! But extravagant and imaginary desires, for riches, fame, power, and also for licentious pleasures, are nothing but mental diseases. Then, too, there are grief, trouble and sorrow, which gnaw the heart and consume it with anxiety, if men fail to realize that the mind need feel no pain unconnected with some pain of body, present or to come. Yet there is no foolish man but is afflicted by some one of these diseases; therefore there is no foolish man that is not unhappy.

Moreover, there is death, the stone of Tantalus ever hanging over men's heads; and superstition, that poisons and destroys all peace of mind. Besides, they do not recollect their past nor enjoy their present blessings; they merely look forward to those of the future, and as these are of necessity uncertain, they are consumed with agony and terror; and the climax of their torment is when they perceive too late that all their dreams of wealth or station, power or fame, have come to nothing. For they never attain any of the pleasures, the hope of which inspired them to undergo all their arduous toils. Or look again at others, petty, narrow-minded men, or confirmed pessimists, or spiteful, envious, ill-tempered creatures, unsociable, abusive, brutal; others again enslaved to the follies of love, impudent or reckless, wanton, headstrong and yet irresolute, always changing their minds. Such failings render their lives one unbroken round of misery. The conclusion is that no foolish man can be happy, nor any wise man fail to be happy. This is a truth that we establish far more conclusively than do the Stoics. For they maintain that nothing is good save that vague phantom which they entitle Moral Worth, a title more splendid than substantial; and say that Virtue resting on this Moral Worth has no need of pleasure, but is herself her own sufficient happiness.

(Translation by Harris Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, vol. XVII, 1931)

Does the failure of every moment of life to be complete pleasure mean that a person is not living wisely, honorably, or justly? Would it be true that no effort to visualize this doctrine can be true because any human example, no matter how wise, honorable, or just he or she may have been, still experienced pain at times?

No - that would be a misreading of the doctrine. Note that Epicurus used words to the effect that **"It is not possible..."** and **"cannot possibly...."** Because there is no fate or providence in Epicurean philosophy or the world in reality, it is not possible to guarantee results. Negative interventions of other people and natural events can and should be minimized to the extent possible, but they cannot be totally avoided. As Epicurus said in the letter to Menoeceus:

...[W]e do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but will often pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them. And often we consider pains superior to pleasures

when submission to the pains for a long time brings us as a consequence a greater pleasure. While therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure is should be chosen, just as all pain is an evil and yet not all pain is to be shunned. It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these matters must be judged. Sometimes we treat the good as an evil, and the evil, on the contrary, as a good.

The full set of graphics for Principal Doctrine 5 can be found here:

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