

70 - Bidding Beauty and Virtue Farewell If They Do Not Bring Pleasure - What Epicurus Did NOT Say Or Mean

THINGS EPICURUS NEVER SAID OR MEANT

What Epicurus *Did* Say:

"Beauty and virtue and the like are to be honored, if they give pleasure, but if they do not give pleasure, we must bid them farewell."

- Bailey, Epicurus' Extant Remains, p 123

What Epicurus *Did Not* Say Or Mean:

Beauty and virtue and such are worthy of honor, [if they cause no harm, do not require excessive struggle, and alleviate either bodily pain or psychological distress].

- Note 70, Selected Fragments, Monadnock.net, 3/1/19

I
noted
this

alleged limitation on what Epicurus meant by "pleasure" just this morning, and don't have the time to expand the argument beyond what is below. I have a lot of respect and appreciation for the author of the Monadnock website, but I think this alleged interpretation of "pleasure" in this fragment is a serious misinterpretation of the meaning. This is Stoic-influenced projection, and there is no way that ancient Epicureans would have accepted this understanding of what Epicurus was teaching, from the man who was famous for his candor, and who explicitly endorsed pleasure as normally understood rather than word games, and who said:

I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, of sex, of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form. - Diogenes Laertius

He differs from the Cyrenaics with regard to pleasure. They do not include under the term the pleasure which is a state of rest, but only that which consists in motion. Epicurus admits both; also pleasure of mind as well as of body, as he states in his work On Choice and Avoidance and in that On the Ethical End, and in the first book of his work On Human Life and in the epistle to his philosopher friends in Mytilene. So also Diogenes in the seventeenth book of his Epilecta, and Metrodorus in his Timocrates, whose actual words are: "Thus Pleasure being conceived both as that

species which consists in motion and that which is a state of rest.” The words of Epicurus in his work On Choice are : “Peace of mind and freedom from pain are pleasures which imply a state of rest; joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity.” - Diogenes Laertius

They affirm that there are two states of feeling, pleasure and pain, which arise in every animate being, and that the one is favorable and the other hostile to that being, and by their means choice and avoidance are determined; and that there are two kinds of inquiry, the one concerned with things, the other with nothing but words.

- Diogenes Laertius

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?

- Torquatus, In Cicero's On Ends

Source for the alleged limitation - see note to translation of fragment 70:
<http://monadnock.net/epicurus/fragments.html#n70>

Selected Fragments

by Epicurus (Ἐπίκουρος)

translated by Peter Saint-Andre (2011)

This translation renders selected fragments of Epicurus from Greek into English. The numbering follows that of Hermann Usener in his 1887 volume *Epicurus*.

70. Beauty and virtue and such things are worthy of honor, if they bring joy; but if not then bid them farewell [autē] if you cannot bear them.

ἡσυχία καὶ ἀρετὴ καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα, εἴ τις ἀγαθὰ καὶ τιμὰ ἀξίως φέρει, τὰ αὐτῶν ἀποχαιρετίζεσθαι δεῖ, εἰ μὴ δύναται ὑπομένειν αὐτά.

[70] When Epicurus says "if they bring pleasure", he means "if they cause no harm, do not require excessive struggle, and alleviate either bodily pain or psychological distress" -- see [Virtues: Seeing #21](#), [Principal Doctrine #21](#), [Principal Doctrine #3](#), etc. [back]

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