

Epicurean Perspectives on Cultural Conflict

Post by “Cassius” of March 27, 2019 at 10:40 PM

In this part of the discussion I think this passage from book three about the nature of men is relevant, in which generalizations are made about the natures of animals and of men. Now while we would not today talk in terms of the same forces leading to these generalizations, Lucretius/Epicurus seem very comfortable with generalizing, while at the same time saying that reason can still allow us to living lives worthy of the gods despite these generalizations being true. This is the [Bailey translation](#)

*Moreover the mind possesses that heat, which it dons when it boils with rage, and the fire flashes more keenly from the eyes. Much cold breath too it has, which goes along with fear, and starts a shuddering in the limbs and stirs the whole frame. And it has too that condition of air lulled to rest, which comes to pass when the breast is calm and the face unruffled. But those creatures have more of heat, whose fiery heart and passionate mind easily boils up in anger. Foremost **in this class** is the fierce force of lions, who often as they groan break their hearts with roaring, and cannot contain in their breast the billows of their wrath. But the cold heart of deer is more full of wind, and more quickly it rouses the chilly breath in its flesh, which makes a shuddering motion start in the limbs. But the nature of oxen draws its life rather from calm air, nor ever is the smoking torch of anger set to it to rouse it overmuch, drenching it with the shadow of murky mist, nor is it pierced and frozen by the chill shafts of fear: it has its place midway between the two, the deer and the raging lions.*

So is it with the race of men. However much training gives some of them an equal culture, yet it leaves those first traces of the nature of the mind of each. **Nor must we think that such maladies can be plucked out by the roots, but that one man will more swiftly fall into bitter anger, another be a little sooner assailed by fear, while a third will take some things more gently than is right. And in many other things it must needs be that the diverse natures of men differ, and the habits that follow thereon;** but I cannot now set forth the secret causes of these, nor discover names for all the shapes of the first atoms, whence arises this variety in things. One thing herein I see that I can affirm, that so small are the traces of these natures left, which reason could not dispel for us, that nothing hinders us from living a life worthy of the gods.