

A Quote from Hobbes' "Leviathan"

Post by "Cassius" of August 13, 2019 at 5:25 AM

The full context can be found at the link below, but I find this passage very interesting and I will comment on it standing alone, even though I have not read the full context. I would want to study parts of it to be more clear, because I would want to see "things" having very broad reference to include all a person's bodily and mental desires, and not just "material goods." I would also want the meaning to refer to the overall effect of experiencing the pleasures of life predominating over the pains of life as the meaning of felicity, because I believe that Epicurus would say that that result is achievable, or is at least a reasonable goal, for most people.

But the part that strikes me as the most important to consider is the "life is but motion and we can never be without desire, nor without fear, no more than without sense." With the caveat that many fears *can* be eliminated or reduced to a minimum, I think this statement does reflect Epicurus' view of the nature of human life. Life is motion from birth to death, and there is never any final rest from motion until death. This is exactly why I think the modern commentator focus on tranquillity cannot be an accurate expression of Epicurus' own views. Epicurus' started with physics and from the nature of the universe derived his ethics, and that nature compels this conclusion.

In terms of not being able to eliminate all pain entirely, I am reminded of this from Diogenes of Oionanda:

"These medicines we have put [fully] to the test; for we have dispelled the fears [that grip] us without justification, and, as for pains, those that are groundless we have completely excised, while those that are natural we have reduced to an absolute minimum, making their magnitude minute."

The goal is to eliminate those which can be eliminated, and to reduce those which are natural and therefore inevitable to an absolute minimum.

The idea that Epicurus was so unrealistic as to think that people can -- or even should - eliminate ALL pain and fear is absurd. That result would be obtainable only by an Epicurean "god" who had so conquered the makeup of its own atomic structure as to be able to constantly regenerate itself, and have confidence in being able to continue to do so into perpetuity. For us humans in our current state of technology, each of us faces the possibility of a painful death through disease or worse, just like Epicurus himself did. Epicurus offset his physical pain with mental pleasure, but he could not eliminate it.

<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/h/hobbes/thomas/h68I/chapter6.html>