

Glossary - What is the Epicurean Definition of "Pleasure?"

Post by "Cassius" of January 18, 2020 at 8:03 PM

Can this topic get confusing, or what? 😊 Nevertheless, in the end I am convinced that the basic issue is no more complicated than that pleasure is the ultimate guide that nature gave all living things to live by, rather than gods, or abstract logic creating its own goals, or idealism giving us goals set in another dimension. As for the debate on reaching that conclusion, yes it can get confusing, but in the end it's really not a matter to be proved by "debate" or logic anyway - it is a matter of observation and feeling:

This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil. This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict.

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.