

The Argument That the Good Of Animals is Not the Same As The Good of Human Beings

Post by “Cassius” of March 3, 2025 at 3:10 PM

This is a recurring argument against Epicurean ethics, so I wanted to make sure we had a thread on where to find instances of it:

Cicero argues against Epicurus on the distinction between the good of an animal and the good of a human being in several of his works. Here are the relevant references:

1. **De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum (On the Ends of Good and Evil)**

- **Book I, Sections 29-30:** Cicero challenges the Epicurean idea that pleasure is the highest good and argues that human beings have a higher nature than animals.
- **Book II, Sections 12-15:** He critiques the Epicurean view that human beings begin life seeking pleasure in the same way as animals and questions whether this is sufficient for defining human good.
- **Book V, Sections 23-25:** Cicero, through the character of Piso, refutes the idea that human good can be reduced to pleasure, emphasizing the role of reason and virtue.

2. **Tusculanae Disputationes (Tusculan Disputations)**

- **Book V, Sections 76-77:** Cicero distinguishes between human and animal pleasures, arguing that reason elevates humans beyond the mere pursuit of bodily pleasure.

3. **De Natura Deorum (On the Nature of the Gods)**

- **Book I, Section 41:** He critiques the Epicurean notion that gods exist in a state of perfect pleasure, drawing a parallel to how animals and humans conceive of the good differently.

This also appears in Aristotle:

Aristotle, EN I .5 1095b19-20 (Cf. Heraclitus fr. 4 and 29, and Plato, Rep. 586 a-b)

Most entirely slavish people clearly choose the life of cattle...