

Torquatus' Statement of the Epicurean View Of The Ultimate Good In "On Ends"

Post by "Joshua" of October 6, 2021 at 10:40 AM

I think this is something we have to consider in its context. What we now know is that the seat of consciousness is in the brain; the ancients, including the Epicureans, had other ideas. Some believed that the seat of the 'soul' was in the breast with the heart. It is easy to observe in oneself the quickening of the pulse in love or fear; more difficult, to intuit that this behavior is governed by signals from the nervous system.

The Epicureans thought that the 'soul'—call it what you will—consisted of a sort of skein of finer atoms spread throughout all the members. If a portion of this soul rests in the hand at any given point in time, and the soul's chief end is pleasure, perhaps the argument of Chrysippus makes a little more sense?

Of course the shift of the soul from the members or the breast to the brain simply shifts the problem. Does the brain feel the lack of the Supreme good? I think of the restlessness that Lucretius describes of the Roman nobility; in the city they wish they were in the country, and in the country they wish they were in the city.

One of Epicurus' achievements was to instruct us in how to tap new sources of pleasure—even something as simple as remembering past pleasures can be a constant source of genuine pleasure available to us whenever we need it.