

Episode One Hundred Thirty-Four - The Letter to Menoecus 01- Context and Opening of the Letter

Post by "Cassius" of August 8, 2022 at 8:08 AM

One thing I wish I had commented on more emphatically was when Joshua responded to Kalosyni's point about happiness.

At 15:30 Kalosyni says "Everyone knows what happiness is - that it's a feeling."

At 16:20 in part of his response Joshua says "Epicurus says the feelings are two - pleasure and pain."

Joshua didn't pursue that particular point further, but I don't think we can hammer it hard enough:

In the Epicurean worldview, Nature gives us only TWO faculties by which to determine what to choose and avoid, pleasure and pain. There are only TWO feelings - pleasure and pain. And that means that if something is a feeling - if something can be felt - then it is either pleasure or pain, one of the two most comprehensive and basic categories.

And that means that since happiness can be felt, happiness is a pleasure, "by definition." It's not the other way around - pleasure is not properly thought of as being "a happiness." Pleasure is the wider and most basic category, not happiness.

So when the word happiness is used, the Epicurean context demands that happiness be understood as a form of pleasure, not pleasure as a form of happiness.

I think if we keep that hierarchy in mind and apply it rigorously it's much easier to avoid the pitfalls of weird definitions of happiness which are not "feelings" at all.