

Perspectives On "Proving" That Pleasure is "The Good"

Post by "Cassius" of December 19, 2022 at 10:47 PM

Responding on the Epicurus argument, as I understand it it is simply an observation that the command to pursue pleasure and avoid pain is imprinted by Nature, and we know this because we observe through our senses that infants of all living types do it before they are corrupted by arguments in any direction otherwise. And of course in most cases (other than human) no other living being is ever corrupted away from that direction unless clearly by disease or some similar defect.

Now the question of whether we "should" follow nature as adults is something that people certainly have different opinions on, based on all sorts of logic and supernatural revelation. That's the classic argument of Cicero and others that we are not cows - we are somehow "better" than that. But I think Epicurus is saying that it is THOSE arguments which are flimsy. No constructs of the human mind carry the weight by which we should consider them valid to overturn the clear dictate of nature.

Of course people who consider logic and reason to be handed down from on high, or somehow "higher" than nature in any way, will never agree to this form of reasoning. But the observation and conclusion make perfect sense to me, and that's why Epicurus refused to accept that logical reasoning can or should be consulted in order to prove that pleasure is to be pursued and pain avoided.

That's where the dividing line is drawn. If nature provides us no direct leading as to what to avoid and what to pursue other than pleasure and pain, then no amount of argument and no type of logic can ever be accepted to contradict that leadership from nature - if we are to accept nature and not our own brainpower as the ultimate standard.

And this is why the canonic of Epicurus is so important, because it's in this field that we clearly and affirmatively take the position that abstract logical reasoning - divorced from observations based on nature - can never be allowed to trump the clear dictates of nature itself. Ignore the canonic and the physics with which it is intertwined and you'll never be able to have confidence that this is the right conclusion.

And just so I can go on record as potentially offending everyone in the conversation 😊 , that's why I have only limited interest in the modern 'research' --

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Today we have neuroscientific research, such as Barrett, Lembke and others, to provide the "do." (I don't have more specifics at hand; just seeing if this will advance the discussion.)

No amount of "research" is going to convince me more firmly of the truth of Epicurus' conclusion beyond my own observations of the young of all animals - exactly as Epicurus specified. This research and these arguments are interesting and perhaps helpful to some. But I would say that the dictate of nature to pursue pleasure and avoid pain is not something that needs to be proven, or really can be "proven," beyond the clear evidence that has been available to everyone to see for 3000 years (and really much longer than that).

This is why discussing these things is so helpful. It's on *this* issue where Epicurus stands or falls as a philosopher, and where he breaks the chains of both supernatural religion and false philosophy. The hedonic calculus and other practical observations on how to view and pursue pleasure are just icing on the cake. *This* - a confident basis for taking the position that we know pleasure to be "the good" - is the issue on which everything stands or falls.