

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

Post by "Cassius" of December 20, 2022 at 3:44 PM

I think the best presentation of this issues is going to be in the section of DeWitt's book starting here, although it is covered in a lot of other places in the book too. I am not citing this to say "you should believe it because Dewitt said it" but as a starting point for anyone lurking who might want to follow the argument.

THE CANON, REASON AND NATURE

worth while to observe by what procedure this exclusion may be justified and what the consequences will be for the concept of reason itself. The position of Epicurus becomes seemingly paradoxical because there is no instrumentality by which reason can be dethroned except reason itself. Consideration of this paradox may be postponed until it has been shown how the Platonic concept of reason may be rendered absurd. The conclusions will be absolutely logical if the premises are accepted.

As will be set forth in the chapter on Physics, Epicurus adopted and declared Twelve Elementary Principles, one of which reads: "The universe consists of atoms and void." This is a positive statement. If the implied negative be made explicit, it is this, that there is nothing incorporeal except void. This is destructive of certain teachings of Plato. According to him the sensations inform us only of the things that are transient, that have a beginning and an end. The realities are the eternal forms or ideas, which are not joined up with matter and so are incorporeal. Moreover, according to the same teachings the ideas are apprehensible only by pure reason, which, being, like the ideas, discrete from matter, is itself incorporeal and divine. Logically, therefore, if there is nothing incorporeal except void, the eternal ideas and the divine incorporeal reason are alike absurdities.

By this same principle it should be noted that the incorporeal soul is also eliminated. Thus, the soul, being corporeal and incapable of pre-existence or survival, is reduced to a parity with the body. This means farewell to all the disabilities imposed upon it through imprisonment in the body and to all mystical ideas associated with successive incarnations. Corporeal reason alone is left, that is, human intelligence.

There is another of the Twelve Principles that has a specific bearing upon the Platonic concept of reason: "The atoms are always in motion." If we seek the implied negative of this positive statement — and Epicurus reasons after this fashion — it will be this, that nothing else in the universe is in motion, because the void is incapable of motion and outside of atoms and void there is nothing. It will follow also that no other cause of motion exists. It will be nonsensical, therefore, to think of divine reason as the cause of motion.