

Episode 200 - Lucretius Today 200th Episode - Retrospective, Recap, and Looking To The Future

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2023 at 6:20 AM

Another aspect that I am still rolling over in my mind is the difficulty (at least for me) in applying the "absence of pain" terminology to both (1) my general summation and assessment of my condition which includes both pleasures and pains, and (2) an individual sensation / feeling which can be either pleasure or pain but not both or neither.

I personally (and I do not think I am alone) have a strong tendency to interpret "absence of pain" as conveying a focus on a general assessment in which "unless every ounce of pain is eliminated from my life then I haven't achieved anything." That perspective is akin to the Judeo-Christian attitude that we are worms because we all sin and fall short of the glory of god, or the Stoic attitude that "unless we've reached the summit of the mountain all our mountain-climbing is for nothing."

I'm of the view that this perfectionist "all or nothing" attitude is so baked in the cake of modern religion and philosophy that it makes it very hard to even comprehend any other approach. The detailed analysis of the individual feelings and experiences of a variety of pleasures leads me to conclude that to Epicurus it's not a perfect result of "pure pleasure" that is the main thing (other than as a goal), but the moment-by-moment achievement of the best we can do under our own circumstances to ensure the predominance of feelings of pleasure over feelings of pain. Epicurus wasn't experiencing "pure pleasure" on the last day of his life, but up to the end he was doing the best he could to summon up pleasure to override pain, just as Lucretius analogizes Venus calming Mars.

The only way to break out of the "all or nothing" perspective is to engage in the scheme of systematic study, preferably with others "like ourselves" as Epicurus recommends.