

Epicurean Philosophy Vs. Humanism

Post by "Cassius" of May 27, 2019 at 5:33 PM

Let's anticipate an argument: "You can't cite Nietzsche for an Epicurean position! Nietzsche thought that suffering (pain!) was good, and Epicurus thought that ABSENCE of pain was the greatest good."

To unwind that you would have to step through many issues, but here are two important ones:

(1) Epicurus said that we specifically at times choose pain, when the choice leads to greater pleasure or less pain in the end. Epicurus did not advocate the elimination of the ability to feel pain - that would be anaesthesia or death.

(2) Despite what the choir of academics say, "absence of pain" is not the definition of the Epicurean goal for living. The Epicurean goal of living is "pleasure," and "pleasure" and "absence of pain" are not strict equivalents. Epicurus is very clear throughout his writing that pleasure is a **feeling** that all of us understand through our senses. "Absence of pain" is (in my view) best understood as a **concept** which has an important use in showing that pleasure has a limit and can thus be defined as the goal of life.

Concepts are abstractions useful for producing pleasure; concepts are not pleasures in themselves. Words on a page are not pleasures unless we experience them. The reason it is useful to establish a "limit of pleasure" conceptually is to deal with irritants like Plato and Seneca who chatter that nothing can be considered a highest conceptual goal if it can be made better by adding something else to it (i.e., if it has no "limit"). Epicurus points out that all experience is either pleasurable or painful, so when pains are eliminated from experience, then experience is by definition full of pleasures. At that point, experience has conceptually reached its limit of pleasure - its fullest potential - and the Platonists and Aristotelians and humanists are left to walk around endlessly arguing about the meaning of "good."