

Epicurean Philosophy Vs. Humanism

Post by "Cassius" of May 27, 2019 at 7:22 PM

Also - and I know this is one of your favorite sayings, Hiram, that we should not use "empty words." In naming a philosophy or an outlook, the word is intended to summarize the core idea. Probably if one were looking for a single word for Epicurus, the word would be more like "Naturist" or something that identifies the entire sweep of the philosophy - even more so than "pleasure." Putting the word "Human" in that role puts more pressure on it than it can bear, because there is so much more to the universe than humanity. Yes, all that really matters to us is "us," and from a certain perspective "man is the measure of all things" but I don't think Epicurus would have looked at it that way.

If Epicurus had thought that gods created the universe he would have been a theist. If Epicurus thought that there were a realm of ideas he would have been a Platonist. If Epicurus had thought that playing word-games was of supreme importance he would have been a Stoic. But I think he was focused on the big picture of physics, epistemology, and ethics, and selecting out "human" from the picture ends up misrepresenting what it is all about. In fact it begs the question of categories as well, because how do we know what a "human" is, or how a human should live, without answering all those other questions?

I know you are right that most people consider Epicurean philosophy to be both Humanist and Hedonist, but I think it's our job as Epicureans to point the way to a more clear understanding of the big picture. We are not subsets of them - they are a false and narrowed perspective that stand in the way of a more complete understanding.