

Are You Epicurean Or Hieronymian?

Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2019 at 6:34 PM

We will eventually straighten out the posting here, but in the meantime, here is the point: it is absolutely true that all these references to "absence of pain" do exist. The issue is "What do they mean?" and "What do they tell us about the goal of life?" For each reference to "absence of pain" we can find MORE references to "Pleasure," and so it is necessary to determine the relationship between the two. Cicero and Hieronymus and the Greeks knew that the two are absolutely not the same thing. Epicurus had a reason for saying what he said, and it is up to us to figure out what the Epicureans meant from the fragmentary texts that are still available.

Quoting over and over the same passages does nothing to explain to an honest inquirer how to reconcile these things, and the bitter truth for the Hieronymian crowd is that "absence of anything" tells us NOTHING about "what is present" unless we define the terms of the discussion first. Epicurus had already done that - many times it appears - by making the point that there are only two feelings - pleasure and pain. When there are only two of anything, the "absence of one" means that the space formerly occupied (if any) by that thing is now occupied by its opposite.

If you're like Hieronymus and think that "absence of pain" tells you anything specific and practical about how to spend your life, then more power to you, but have the grace to identify yourself as Hieronymian, and allow the Epicureans to pursue the pleasure which Epicurus, and more importantly Nature, calls us to pursue.

Once we have that ground rules of the debate established, we can then discuss with intelligence what the "absence of pain" references do mean, by referring to Plato and the other anti-pleasure philosophers who suggested that "gods" or "virtue" or "ideal forms" give us the standard by which to live our lives.