

Discussion of the Society of Epicurus' 20 Tenets of 12/21/19

Post by "Cassius" of January 1, 2020 at 5:35 PM

[Quote from Oscar](#)

SOE17 To live pleasantly, we must have confident expectation that we will be able to secure the chief goods: those things that are natural and necessary for life, happiness, and health. Therefore, whatever we do to secure safety, friendship, autarchy, provision of food and drink and clothing, and other basic needs, is naturally good.

I wouldn't say whatever we do is good; I think Epicurus stated that in order to live pleasantly, you need to live justly, and without living justly you cannot live pleasantly.

This reminds me of a point I may have omitted to make before: I have a problem with the terminology "the chief goods." I do not recall this phrasing in the Epicurean texts, and it implies that there is a list of "goods" which is higher or more important than others. I think that's a repetition of the same issue commented on before.

"Pleasure" is the guide, and pleasure is the only thing desirable in and of itself. Even when we forgo a specific pleasure in order to avoid a specific pain or pursue a higher pleasure, the motivating force is still the feeling of pleasure, not some specific ranking of "goods" or even a specific ranking of pleasures coming somehow from outside our own feeling of pleasure. What is "chief" for me may not be "chief" for thee.

I am very reluctant ever to imply that there is an "objective" ranking of pleasures, and for the same reason I think it is perilous to suggest that there are "chief goods." I am not aware of Epicurean texts that would support that assertion, and I would dispute it if someone suggested that the "natural and necessary" method of analysis ultimately supports a ranking of "chief goods." Even "natural / necessary" as a method of analysis probably goes out the door when we decide that it is worth it for us to die for a friend, which is specifically contemplated as something an Epicurean might on occasion do.

The bottom line here is that I suspect that "chief good" is just a phrase that has been picked up for convenience in Society of Epicurus discussion rather than being based on a clear text. As always, please correct me if I am incorrect.