

Glossary - What is the Epicurean Definition of "Pleasure?"

Post by "Cassius" of January 17, 2020 at 9:05 AM

Quote from Cassius

Epicurus was focusing on definition by examples.

And wherever possible, it seems to me that Epicureans and the leading Epicureans gave examples in the form of "pictures" - such as referencing sheep on the side of the hill blending into a white spot, floating dusk for atoms, the shades at the Colosseum giving color to the Senators beneath them, etc. The point being that Epicurus necessarily had to use words, but his words were tied as closely as possible to "pictures" of things in everyday experience. And I think that is what he was referring to in the letter to Herodotus referring to following the first picture that a word evokes in order to not get lost in word games.

Quote

For this purpose it is essential that the first mental image associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference. (Letter to Herodotus)

So probably another example might be that we learn much more about happiness by observing (observing, actual or pictures) examples of smiling people, tail-wagging dogs, purring cats, playing children, etc. than we ever learn about happiness by listing out 50 different words in different languages that allegedly mean the same thing, or looking up synonyms in a thesaurus, or reading about the etymology of any word for "happiness" in a dictionary.

Clarity of expression in dealing with happiness or pleasure ultimately comes back to those personal experiences in examples, not stinging together a series of symbols that, but for our definitions, are absolutely meaningless in Nature.