

Daily Interactions With The Non-Epicurean World

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2020 at 3:00 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

This choosing is an intuitive and hard to describe process, and of course it's different for everybody so it may not even be useful to try to describe it. But my opinion is that working with this process is far more important than any life hack, unless you want to think of it as a life hack. At any rate, this is giving me more confidence in my choices and, as a natural consequence, more focus in my daily activities.

At risk of going way off topic, this passage on on the issue of being able to understand yourself, reminded me of the "know thyself" phrase and issue, and that called to my mind a passage from a book I like very much and have talked about a little - "Dialogue on Innate Principles" by Jackson Barwis. I think the attitude he takes toward this issue is something with which Epicurus would agree, given Epicurus' view of the "canon of truth" and what it is it can and can not reveal to us:

Here is the key line: "*... the knowledge we may attain of our own nature and principles is more clear and more certain, comes to us easier and with better evidence, then we can possibly acquire concerning the nature and principles of any other creatures.*"

More context:

Quote

It has long been an applauded fashion to make collections and to roam abroad in search of rarities and monsters for others to gaze at, indulging a sort of idle industry in vain curiosity concerning things but little relative, or perhaps quite foreign, to our nature: and such trifling is dignified with the honorable names of learning and knowledge. So much engaged without doors, however, it cannot be but our affairs at home must suffer, and our most interesting concerns lie neglected. For though I do by no means agree with those who think the most difficult of all knowledge is the knowledge of ourselves, yet I am very certain that men whose minds are continually employed in extraneous subjects of science, or in those amusing external arts which are irrelative to moral life, are but very rarely even tolerable proficient in the home-science. Indeed, it is not to be expected that a man should be skillful in an art which he has never allowed himself time to think of or leisure to attend to.

-- I am very sensible of the fashionable folly, said I, and know very well and have cheap a rate literary distinctions are purchased; and I must agree with you that a mind much addicted to extraneous researches is not likely to be very well-informed at home: but I should be glad to know why you think the attainment of a knowledge of ourselves is less difficult than commonly imagined?

I do not think, replied he, that any kind of knowledge can be acquired without attention and study: but the knowledge we may attain of our own nature and principles is more clear and more certain, comes to us easier and with better evidence, than we can possibly acquire concerning the nature and principles of any other creatures. What man can doubt that it is more easy for him to know himself than it is for him to know any other man, or than it is for any other man to know him? If a man be incapable of knowing himself, a subject with which he is so intimately, so sensibly united; whose principles, sentiments, perceptions, thoughts, and designs he can always inspect and know without disguise whenever he pleases to view them impartially, I say if he be incapable of knowing himself with the aid of so much previous, clear, intelligence, how much more incapable must he be of knowing any other man whose thoughts and designs he cannot be so sure of, or any other creature whose nature and true principles can never with certainty be known to him? In short, the truth is this, that unless a man be a tolerable adept in the knowledge of himself, and can perceive all the various turnings and windings of the human affections and passions and their effects in his own heart, he can have no rule or measure by which he may form and regulate his judgment concerning the actions and intentions of others.

I think you are right, said I.

-- It is probably, therefore, a truer maxim, continued he, to say that it is easier for a man to know himself than to know any other man or any other creature; and that a man's knowledge of other men and of other creatures will very much increase as he advances in the knowledge of himself and of his own nature. For his most rational conjectures concerning the natures of other animals are principally founded on what he is conscious of in himself as an animal.

So as Godfrey says, I think this attitude that we are capable of understanding that which is really important to us "...is giving me more confidence in my choices and, as a natural consequence, more focus in my daily activities."