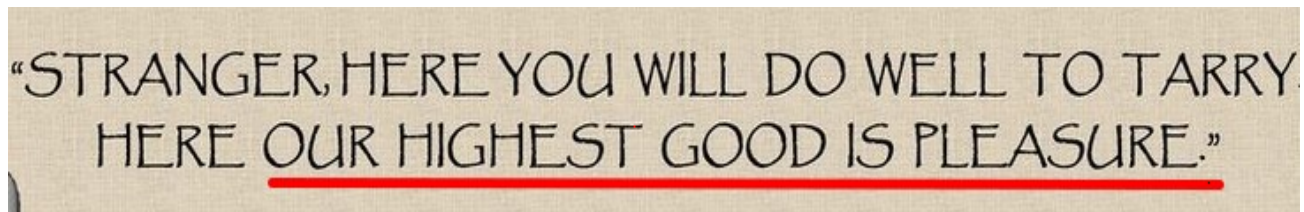


Comment at the Epicurean Philosophy Facebook Group On Pleasure As The Highest Good

Post by "Cassius" of September 16, 2020 at 7:48 AM

I don't encourage anyone who is not currently using Facebook to use it, and I am gradually but progressively cutting back on using it myself. I mainly use it for "recruitment" to come into contact with people I never would otherwise, so I do monitor and help with moderating the page. As long as I have time I'll probably continue to do that, just like I encourage people, if they desire, to participate in Reddit or other forums where they might meet like-minded people who would be good to get to know. I consider this Epicureanfriends.com forum to be the place where I post everything of significance where I want to be sure that it is preserved and seen and discussed by like-minded people, but that doesn't mean we should ignore other places where we can find good people.

[Today I posted this at Facebook](#), which I think is a useful reminder here at Epicureanfriends too:



Seems to me that it is time for a periodic reminder to current participants and applicants to the Epicurean Philosophy Facebook Group: At the top of our group page we have the slogan traditionally attested to have been the "motto" of the original school of Epicurus in Athens - "Stranger, here you will do well to tarry, here our highest good is PLEASURE." (emphasis added)

In other places around the internet you will encounter people who talk as if Epicurus held "painlessness" or "tranquility" or "stillness" to be the highest good, as if they know better than Epicurus what he "should" have said. This Facebook page is devoted to a classical interpretation that takes Epicurus at his word, and incorporates within his system all his statements about tranquility and absence of pain in a way that gives full effect to everything he said, without rewriting Epicurus to suit modern neo-Stoic idealism about the nature of virtue and pleasure.

The moderators maintain this group with that classical Epicurean view in mind. We welcome and encourage you to submit posts and participate in threads with the goal of pleasure in view. We are mindful that there are many who disagree with the "pleasure" emphasis, and we moderate the group to ensure that those of us who wish to associate with the classical view

have a place here where we can do so with like-minded people. If you are firmly of the view that the word "painlessness" represents the ideal that you wish to be associated with in studying Epicurus, then you will find many other places on the internet and at Facebook where your arguments will be welcomed. We ask that you respect our goals within this group and post those arguments elsewhere.

Citations convince no one who has their mind made up on this subject, but for those who are new to the group or to Epicurean Philosophy, here are several of the most clear statements in the ancient Epicurean texts on this issue:

(1) [Epicurus' Letter to Menoecus](#):

And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.

(2) Torquatus in Cicero's On Ends:

I will start then in the manner approved by the author of the system himself, by settling what are the essence and qualities of the thing that is the object of our inquiry; not that I suppose you to be ignorant of it, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil. This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict.

...

The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

(3) Diogenes of Oinoanda, Fragment 32

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into "What is the means of happiness?" and they wanted to say "the virtues" (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not "what is the means of happiness?" but "What is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?", I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end. Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

It's one of the purposes of this group to meet new people with whom to share our views, so these topics will always be welcome issues for discussion as we go forward. But as a result of our openness to meeting new people, you'll sometimes see debate about these issues from those who hold opposing positions, so please be careful to be sure you work to understand what you read. We'll appreciate your help and comments in moderating the group to keep the argument under control, and we ask your understanding that this group isn't a general philosophy forum where debate for the sake of debate, and argument for the sake of argument, is appropriate.

Note: I am only one of the moderators of the group, and I write here only from my own perspective about our goals and moderating guidelines. Please consult the "About" page and the opening post from Elli for a full statement of our long-standing guidelines.