

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

Post by "Don" of September 18, 2020 at 10:40 AM

Quote

I think Epicurus was thinking that all communication through words is inherently limited and fall short of reality, just like math and geometry are inherently limited in what they can do. I believe that this position is one of the most important in the philosophy as providing the antidote to rationalism. No matter how clear we try to make our words or our theorems they will always fall short of reality.

I'm open-minded here, but what leads you to think this? I agree that we experience reality subjectively, but the only medium we have to communicate anything is through shared language. If Epicurus had the realizations he did and only experienced it for himself but didn't use language to communicate it, we wouldn't be discussing any of this.

Now, I will admit that we can communicate with "body language" - a comforting hug, a stern look - and that is immediate if the cultural context is shared. But that can't convey complex ideas from my head to yours. We have to use language, and Epicurus is advocating using the most simple, direct language to accomplish this to cut down the possibility of misunderstanding. Now, we have to interpret his words because we neither live in his cultural context nor speak Ancient Greek as a first language.

I would contend that rationalism makes use of rhetoric and flowery speech to obfuscate reality. Epicurus advocates direct language to uncover and convey reality as it exists. That's still a blow against elevating rationalism but he can't argue against rationalism unless he sets the parameters of what kind of language to use.