

Before We Answer "How Do We Achieve Happiness?" we have to answer "What is Happiness?"

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Time for a reminder of one of the most precise formulations in the Epicurean texts. The issue is NOT "How do we achieve happiness?" And the reason that's NOT the question is that "happiness" is an ambiguous term that means very different things to different people. Rather, the issue IS: "What is happiness?" and "What is the ultimate goal of our nature?" The Epicurean answer to those questions is contained in one word: "Pleasure" - which is not "chocolate cake" but instead one of any number of pleasurable feelings we perceive through the faculties given us by nature. The choice here is not cake vs pie vs art vs music, the choice is "revelation" vs "virtue" vs "the natural faculty of pleasure." Which means the choice is God/Allah/Yahweh vs humanism/virtue ethics/conventional morality vs Epicurean philosophy. No need to trust me on this, look to Diogenes of Oinoanda speaking for Epicurus from stones 2000 years old, translated by Martin Ferguson Smith:

"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."

Or if you prefer Cicero/Torquatus speaking for Epicurus in On Ends: "If then even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on pleasure, whereas pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure."

http://www.english.enoanda.cat/the_inscription.html