

Episode Eighty-One - Development of the Arts - The End of Book Five


Post by "Cassius" of July 31, 2021 at 8:19 PM

What about the Greek, Don? I know the first thing that comes to mind is PD3:

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Principal Doctrine 3

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Ὁρος τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος ὑπεξάιρεις· ὅπου δ' ἂν τὸ
(The) limit of magnitude of the pleasures (is) the [removal] of everything → painful → Wherever [there is] → → →
ἡδόμενον ἐνῆ, καθ' ὃν ἂν χρόνον ἦ, οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἀλγοῦν ἢ τὸ λυπούμενον ἢ τὸ
pleasure → → → however long it may be (present) → there is [no] → pain or → sadness or →
συναμφότερον. 
both together

Translation

If viewed in that way, this is pretty much mirror of what is stated in the letter to Meneoceus as:

Quote

The right understanding of these facts enables us to refer all choice and avoidance to the health of the body and (the soul's) freedom from disturbance, since this is the aim of the life of blessedness. For it is to obtain this end that we always act, namely, to avoid pain and fear. And when this is once secured for us, all the tempest of the soul is dispersed, since the living creature has not to wander as though in search of something that is missing, and to look for some other thing by which he can fulfill the good of the soul and the good of the body. For it is then that we have need of pleasure, when we feel pain owing to the absence of pleasure; (but when we do not feel pain), we no longer need pleasure.

So if we focus on the "goal" or "purpose" aspect then PD3 is not to focus on what is the "highest" pleasure, or calling absence of pain the highest pleasure, but more like "The **purpose** of [the pursuit of ?] pleasure is the removal of pain...."

Which of course reminds us of the constant issue of how to characterize "absence of pain" - but that's not a problem when one keeps in mind the full picture of the philosophy, which includes (1) the true positive meaning of the feeling of pleasure, and (2) the issue that Epicurus would have wanted to combat the claim that the pursuit of pleasure can never be satisfied, which is the "limits" argument raised by Plato in [Philebus](#).

I do think that the most damaging aspect of the modern interpretations of this is to equate absence of pain with the "highest" pleasure, and viewing this as a restatement of the **purpose of pursuit** of pleasure, rather than the "highest" pleasure, is probably an effective way of dismissing that argument. Especially when we continue to view all actions (including the pursuit of anything) as a tool to be evaluated in terms of whether it results in pleasure or not.