

An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2021 at 7:04 AM

I am not fluent in Tusculun Disputations but it appears I am going to have to go through it again. Trying to do so quickly now, this may be the point DeWitt is describing the need to show that the good man is 'always' happy:

442 THE TUSCULAN DISPUTATIONS.

X. But it is the duty of one who would argue accurately, to consider not what is said, but what is said consistently. As in that very opinion which we have adopted in this discussion, namely, that every good man is always happy; it is clear what I mean by good men: I call those both wise and good men, who are provided and adorned with every virtue. Let us see, then, who are to be called happy. I imagine, indeed, that those men are to be called so, who are possessed of good without any alloy of evil: nor is there any other notion connected with the word that expresses happiness, but an absolute enjoyment of good without any evil. Virtue cannot attain this, if there is anything good besides itself: for a crowd of evils would present themselves, if we were to allow poverty, obscurity, humility, solitude, the loss of friends, acute pains of the body, the loss of health, weakness, blindness, the ruin of one's country, banishment, slavery, to be evils: for a wise man may be afflicted by all these evils, numerous and important as they are, and many others also may be added; for they are brought on by chance, which may attack a wise man: but if these things are evils, who can maintain that a wise man is always happy, when all these evils may light on him at the same time? I therefore do not easily agree with my friend Brutus, nor with our common masters, nor those ancient ones, Aristotle, Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemon, who reckon all that I have mentioned above as evils, and yet they say that a wise man is always happy; nor can I allow them, because they are distressed with this beautiful and illustrious

further down

WHETHER VIRTUE BE SUFFICIENT FOR A HAPPY LIFE. 443

Epicurus, who, with submission to the Gods, thinks a wise man always happy. He is much charmed with the dignity of this opinion, but he never would have owned that, had he attended to himself: for what is there more inconsistent, than for one who could say that pain was the greatest or the only evil, to think also that a wise man can possibly say in the midst of his torture, How sweet is this! We are not, therefore, to form our judgment of philosophers from detached sentences, but from their consistency with themselves, and their ordinary manner of talking.

and even further down, where Epicurus is still under attack:

458 THE TUSCULAN DISPUTATIONS.

the greatest evil, but the only one! Nor did he take any trouble to provide himself with those remedies which might have enabled him to bear pain; such as firmness of mind, a shame of doing anything base, exercise, and the habit of patience, precepts of courage, and a manly hardiness: but he says that he supports himself on the single recollection of past pleasures, as if any one, when the weather was so hot as that he was scarcely able to bear it, should comfort himself by recollecting that he was once in my country Arpinum, where he was surrounded on every side by cooling streams: for I do not apprehend how past pleasures can allay present evils. But when he says that a wise man is always happy, who would have no right to say so if he were consistent with himself, what may they not do, who allow nothing to be desirable, nothing to be looked on as good but what is honourable! Let, then, the Peripatetics and old Academics follow my example, and at length leave off muttering to themselves; and openly and with a clear voice let them be bold to say, that a happy life may not be inconsistent with the agonies of Phalaris's bull.

XXVII. But to dismiss the subtleties of the Stoics, which

And here Cicero argues that the wise man must have his chief good 'in his power':

never halt, as I said, on the outside and threshold of the prison: for what can be baser, what can carry a worse appearance, than to be left alone, separated from those beautiful attendants! not however that this is by any means possible: for neither can the virtues hold together without happiness, nor happiness without the virtues: so that they will not suffer her to desert them, but will carry her along with them, to whatever toments, to whatever pain they are led. For it is the peculiar quality of a wise man to do nothing that he may repent of, nothing against his inclination: but always to act nobly, with constancy, gravity, and honesty: to depend on nothing as certainty: to wonder at nothing, when it falls out, as if it appeared strange and unexpected to him: to be independent of every one, and abide by his own opinion. For my part, I cannot form an idea of anything happier than this. The conclusion of the Stoics is indeed easy; for since they are persuaded that the end of good is to live agreeably to nature, and to be consistent with that,—as a wise man should do so, not only because it is his duty, but because it is in his power, it must of course follow, that whoever has the chief good in his power, has his happiness so too. And thus the life of a wise man is always happy. You have here what I think may be confidently said of a happy life, and as things now stand, very truly also, unless you can advance something better.

Then we come to this line that is very useful in arguing that Epicurus did not hold "freedom from pain" to be the highest good. That was Hieronymus, not Epicurus:

agreeable to the opinions and discipline of all.

XXX. These then are the opinions, as I think, that are held and defended: the first four are simple ones; "that nothing is good but what is honest," according to the Stoics: "nothing good but pleasure," as Epicurus maintains: "nothing good but a freedom from pain," as Hieronymus¹ asserts: "nothing good but an enjoyment of the principal, or all, or the greatest goods of nature," as Carneades maintained against the Stoics:—these are simple, the others are mixed propositions. Then there are three kinds of goods; the greatest being those of the mind, the next best those of the body, the third are external goods, as the Peripatetics call them, and the old Academics differ very little from them. Dinomachus² and Callipho³ have coupled pleasure with honesty: but Diodorus,⁴ the Peripatetic, has joined indolence to honesty. These are the opinions that have some footing; for those of Aristo,⁵ Pyrrho,⁶ Herillus,⁷ and of some others, are quite out

¹ Hieronymus was a Rhodian, and a pupil of Aristotle, flourishing about 300 B.C. He is frequently mentioned by Cicero.

² We know very little of Dinomachus. Some MSS. have Clitomachus.

³ Callipho was in all probability a pupil of Epicurus, but we have no certain information about him.

⁴ Diodorus was a Syrian, and succeeded Critolaus as the head of the Peripatetic School at Athens.