

Collecting Ancient Instances of the Argument: "Pleasure Cannot Be The Highest Good Because It Has No Limit"

Post by "Cassius" of December 30, 2021 at 9:59 AM

Very good post by Don there. The quote from Diogenes Laertius is very helpful, but probably fits in the category of having subtle implications that need further explanation.

I think it's generally a bad idea to try to dig out too much meaning in words that may not have been intended to be so precise, but here I would say:

The "can be conceived" is crucial. He's not saying "Epicurus held that there are two types of pleasure, one better than the other. I would argue he is continuing the same context of the debate with Plato. It is possible to "conceive" - to "conceptualize" two types of pleasure. One of those cannot be increased, which the gods experience, or which we can conceive "by definition," and the other being the kind that we ordinary mortals can experience, a continual flow of a mix of pleasures and pains in which pleasures can be experienced to go up and down with experience.

I say this because I can easily hear the "Tranquilists" saying -- DL is saying that Epicurus held that there are two types of pleasure, one experienced by the gods, and that's better than the ordinary kind, and what he's referring to is "Tranquility!"

I can easily hear that being argued, and I think that needs to be swatted down with all the intensity that can be mustered. The goal is "Pleasure" - not "the pleasure of the gods" or "tranquility" or anything else.