

From The "Golden Mean" to the "Summum Bonum" - Useful or Deceptive Frames of Reference?

Post by "Cassius" of February 13, 2022 at 7:36 PM

Thanks for this deep analysis!

I'll just leave the point as is at the moment, because I am not nearly as qualified as DeWitt or even Don to parse the Latin and Greek. I will repeat that I do see differences between "good" and "goal" and I can imagine all sorts of confusion arising from those distinctions. I am reminded of the phrase in Book Two of Lucretius - "...GUIDE of life, divine pleasure." (ipsaque deducit dux vitae dia voluptas)

I am particularly not willing to say that I think DeWitt is definitely right, or definitely wrong, because it does appear to me that Epicurus was cautioning against walking around uselessly harping on the meaning of the good, and I see this as something that other philosophers are harping on rather than Epicurus. The danger to me only comes when we get fixated on the "greatest good" and presume that there is a single answer to that question that fits everyone. I am not sure that Epicurus accepted any real logical framework other than the observation that nature gives us only two signals by which to determine what to choose and what to avoid, and that is pleasure and pain. Torquatus himself seems to say that even in this same On Ends - only a few moments after he had framed the question in this very way.

Is DeWitt correct to say that pleasure and pain have meaning only to the living, so that without life pleasure and pain are of no consequence to us? Certainly I would say that the answer to that is "yes."

Does that make pleasure or life the "highest good?" I am afraid that I think that is a linguistic exercise that is fraught with many dangers. So at least for the moment I consider that to be a question that cannot readily be answered. And I remain uncertain that the question "What is the greatest good?" was a way in which Epicurus himself liked to frame his philosophy.