

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

Post by "Don" of February 14, 2022 at 12:19 AM

You posted another reply as I was typing this, but I think this address posts #33 and #35 above...

As I said previously, saying "pleasure is the 'highest good' (summum bonum)" doesn't mean the "best among equally good things"; it means the highest, greatest, loftiest, first, supreme, best, utmost, extreme good thing - the one good thing that stands alone; the good thing to which all other good things points. It is the sum of all good things; the summit of all good things.

I sincerely don't understand the hesitancy in this thread. Or the problem that is trying to be solved when it comes to calling pleasure either the "highest good" or the telos or even the guide. I would say pleasure is called the guide because it's the beacon at the summit to which we are trying to get at. It's the North Star by which we steer all our choices and avoidances. It's the goal and the guide.

All the schools of philosophy in ancient Greece were arguing what was the purpose of a human life, what was it all leading up to, what was it for. I don't think Epicurus was any different in that respect. His revolution was in naming pleasure as that to which life pointed. But not Cyrenaic "sex, drugs, and rock n roll" momentary pleasures strung together - not an endless string of drinking parties and festivals - but something deeper and more long-lasting including being able to describe it as the health of the body and the tranquility of the mind. I think that was his revolution: to define pleasure wide enough for everyone to partake of it as the telos/guide/greatest good/The Good/T'agathon/etc.

I know I don't have to quote chapter and verse to many here, but, for the record, here are some pertinent excerpts (at least from my perspective):

[PD25](#) Εἰ μὴ παρὰ πάντα καιρὸν ἐπανοίσεις ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐπὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ προκαταστρέψεις εἴ τε φυγῆν εἴ τε δίωξιν ποιούμενος εἰς ἄλλό τι, οὐκ ἔσονται σοι τοῖς λόγοις αἱ πράξεις ἀκόλουθοι.

[PD25](#) If at all critical times you do not connect each of your actions to the **natural goal of nature**, [pleasure] but instead turn too soon to some other kind of goal in thinking whether to avoid or pursue something, then your thoughts and your actions will not be in harmony.

Letter to Menoikeus: "The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to

decide all choice and rejection for *the health of the body and for the tranquility of the mind*, (i.e., the health of both our physical and our mental existence), since this is *the goal (τέλος) of a blessed life*.

Letter to Menoikeus: "we say pleasure is the foundation and **fulfillment**, the beginning and **end** (ἀρχὴν καὶ **τέλος**) of the blessed life."

Letter to Menoikeus: "one who has rationally determined (ἐπιλελογισμένου) the τέλος of one's natural state." [which is pleasure]