

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

Post by "Don" of February 17, 2022 at 6:54 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I read Epicurus as saying that the exercise really accomplishes very little other than answering the philosophic question that the others insist on asking. Once you have identified "pleasure" as the answer to the logic game, you're still at the very beginning of your analysis of how to act in a particular situation.

That's exactly the opposite conclusion I'm reaching. I think Epicurus felt the answer one gives to that question "What is the Chief Good?" accomplishes everything. If you're aiming at something other than pleasure, your "conduct of life" is going to be off kilter. To me, it's not a "logic game," it's as practical as it gets for Epicurus in this "problem" that "all philosophers" are expected to answer. Aristotle's and "Torquatus's" definition of the Chief Good is simply "that to which all else points." Basically, why do we do what we as humans do. The telos for Epicurus is related to the chief good, but Aristotle took the idea of the telos to its absurd conclusion: e.g., the telos of the eye is to see. If I remember, Lucretius puts that idea to rest. However, the supreme good/ultimate end has concrete practical application:

Quote from Aristotle

"If therefore among the ends (τέλος/telos) at which our actions aim there be one which we will for its own sake, while we will the others only for the sake of this, and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (which would obviously result in a process ad infinitum, so that all desire would be futile and vain), it is clear that this one ultimate End must be the Good, and indeed the Supreme Good. [2] Will not then a knowledge of this Supreme Good be also of great practical importance for the conduct of life?"

One of my reasons for maintaining Epicurus would say there is a supreme good is his distaste for infinite division or regression. Part of Aristotle's definition here is: *if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (which would obviously result in a process ad infinitum, so that all desire would be futile and vain), it is clear that this one ultimate End must be the Good, and indeed the Supreme Good.* It seems to me Epicurus would say, "Okay, so you ask what is it that is the ultimate end of our actions what our conduct of life should steer by? It is pleasure. We choose everything because of pleasure, sometimes pleasure in the moment, sometimes pleasure in the future, but always pleasure. Not virtue. Not wisdom. Not the καλός. I

spit on all those unless they bring pleasure." *That* "fact" - that pleasure is the one thing to which all else aims - then underpins all of Epicurus's "conduct of life."

PS: Of course, there are many things which produce pleasure, just as there are many virtuous actions, just as there are many ways to become wise, just as there are many beautiful things (one meaning of καλός. That doesn't negate the fact that we should steer toward pleasure as the chief aim.