

Perspectives On "Proving" That Pleasure is "The Good"

Post by "Don" of December 24, 2022 at 1:05 AM

In taking a look again at Cicero:

Quote from Cicero, on ends, 1.42

42 "Pleasure and pain moreover supply the motives of desire and of avoidance, and the springs of conduct generally. This being so, it clearly follows that actions are right and praiseworthy only as being a means to the attainment of a life of pleasure. But that which is not itself a means to anything else, but to which all else is a means, is what the Greeks term the Telos, the highest, ultimate or final Good. It must therefore be admitted that the Chief Good is to live agreeably.

"Those who place the Chief Good in virtue alone are beguiled by the glamour of a name, and do not understand the true demands of nature. If they will consent to listen to Epicurus, they will be delivered from the grossest error. Your school dilates on the transcendent beauty of the virtues; but were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem them either praiseworthy or desirable?"

So, the "highest good" = the Chief Good = summum bonum "highest or ultimate good" = Latin for telos τέλος "completion, maturity, accomplishment, fulfillment, perfection, consummation; result, product; end; boundary, border, extremity; supreme power" = tagathon ταγαθον, literally "the good"

The Chief Good is a category unto itself. It is "that which is not itself a means to anything else, but to which all else is a means."

So the discussion was about determining what was the end point of All human action, what should humans base their actions on. For Epicurus, it was clearly pleasure if you wanted to live "agreeably." For Stoics, it was virtue; but Epicurus (via Cicero via "Torquatus") says they are "beguiled...on the transcendent beauty of the virtues; but were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem them either praiseworthy or desirable?"

So, candidates for the telos/Chief Good were things like virtue, pleasure, wisdom. This is a select subset of traits or phenomena that could serve as the prime foundation for all choices and rejections. For a Stoic, virtue should be the foundation of this.

This category of candidates for Chief Good is NOT the category of every "good thing" that produces pleasure. That's a whole separate thing.