Feedback From A User

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2020 at 6:07 PM

Excellent question Lee. No, certainly not fully consistent, but I think if you re-read from the beginning of the dialog, and especially if you were to read the "Three Dialogues on Liberty" that are similar in form, you would conclude as I do that Barwis' is at best a Deist and maybe not even that, and that his religious references are more superficial than fundamental. In fact in Three Dialogues on Liberty he makes lots of references to how religion is a foe to liberty.

Further, on this precise question, he also seems to be dealing with the definitions of "good" and "evil" which need to be dealt with. It seems to me that while he is admitting that pleasure and pain are the fundamental drivers, he is trying to carve out a caveat for the words "good" and "evil" as more broad terms, maybe in the way that we can describe physical exercise as good (in being productive of ultimate pleasure) while being painful while we do it. It seems to me that he wants to use good and evil to describe "actions" to account for the fact that the same action as we know can sometime be pleasurable and sometimes be pleasurable.

So in the end I think to answer the question by asking Barwis whether, if he is not referring good to pleasure, what IS he referring it to? And in reading the text he does not give a clear answer, other than maybe some lofty words. Now lofty words are trademarks of Stoicism / Platonism / Religion, so I would not argue with someone who wants to fault him for that. But my guess after reading this many times is that the kind of fault that he deserves is the kind that belongs to someone who knows the truth, but doesn't want to express it straightforwardly for reasons of his own. (Afraid?)

So yes taking this passage out of context it definitely rings with problems. But when you look at the rest of the text, and see that the purpose of the work is to undercut the "blank slate" theory by focusing on feeling, without giving any real credit to standard religion or standard idealism, I think the final result is something that I do think is very helpful for someone who is thinking about how to apply the Epicurean insight that "feeling" is the real standard of Nature.