

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Don" of June 23, 2020 at 10:08 PM

Here are some of my initial thoughts on the Aristippus chapter.

"[Aristippus] derived pleasure from what was present, and did not toil to procure the enjoyment of something not present"

This would appear to contrast with Epicurus's teaching that we don't choose every pleasure that presents itself but weigh it against possible resulting pains.

To me, the following seems to be showing the Cyrenaics' "end/telos" being contrasted with the Epicureans' "happiness/eudaimonia" so I disagree with [Cassius](#) on the interpretation here:

II.86-87 "They [the Cyrenaics] laid down that there are two states, pleasure and pain, the former a smooth, the latter a rough motion, and that pleasure does not differ from pain nor is one pleasure more pleasant than another. The one state is agreeable and the other repellent to all living things. [NOTE: Epicurus seems to agree with this latter part.] However, the bodily pleasure which is the end is... not the settled pleasure [καταστηματικὴν ἡδονὴν *katastēmatikēn hēdonēn*, the infamous "katastematic pleasure"] following the removal of pains, or the sort of freedom from discomfort which Epicurus accepts and maintains to be the end. They [Cyrenaics] also hold that there is a difference between "end" and "happiness." [τέλος and εὐδαιμονίας "telos, eudaimonia" in the original] Our [i.e., the Cyrenaics? as if quoting one of their works?] end is particular pleasure, whereas [the Epicureans'] happiness is the sum total of all particular pleasures, in which are included both past and future pleasures. [88] Particular pleasure is desirable for its own sake, whereas happiness is desirable not for its own sake but for the sake of particular pleasures."

The mention of "past and future pleasures" makes me think that the Epicureans are the ones being said to concern themselves with "happiness / eudaimonia" and the Cyrenaics are the ones concerned with "particular pleasure" at least as far as the Cyrenaics themselves are concerned. From this, it appears to me that the Cyrenaics are saying (via DL) that the Epicureans are concerned with "the sum total of all particular pleasures."

It seems to me that what the Cyrenaics are saying is that what is important is to have every pleasure as it comes, in the moment, then they're contrasting that (via DL) with the Epicureans' "eudaimonia/happiness" which is assessed on sum of sequential pleasures experienced throughout a pleasant life.

Which follows on to the next section:

"Nor again do they admit that pleasure is derived from the memory or expectation of good, which was a doctrine of Epicurus."

So, the Cyrenaics only recognized pleasures of motion experienced in the present. Pleasures in the past don't seem to have mattered: they're done! Pleasures in the future didn't matter: they're not being experienced! Epicurus took the step to recognize that the memory of pleasures past was itself pleasurable and thinking of upcoming pleasures was pleasurable as well.

Which gets at another of the Cyrenaics' objections to Epicurus:

"[89] The removal of pain, however, which is put forward in Epicurus, seems to them not to be pleasure at all, any more than the absence of pleasure is pain."

So, according to Cyrenaics, Epicureans don't recognize an intermediate state: neither pleasure nor pain. It's either one or the other. Which seems to me why Epicurus needed to recognize mental pleasure as pleasure in contrast to the Cyrenaics who say there **must** be motion involved, smooth motion = pleasure; rough motion = pain, and **"they hold that pleasure is not derived from sight or from hearing alone."**

I'm not sure this passage is saying they did not enjoy the "most irksome business" of making choices and rejections of pleasures or if it says it was just difficult to decide what pleasures to indulge in:

"For these reasons they paid more attention to the body than to the mind. Hence, although pleasure is in itself desirable, yet they hold that the things which are productive of certain pleasures are often of a painful nature, the very opposite of pleasure; so that to accumulate the pleasures which are productive of happiness appears to them a most irksome business."

There's more to say here, but I'll stop there for now.