

Dialogue on Katastematic Pleasure

Post by “Cassius” of February 19, 2018 at 7:02 AM

No, I am not ignoring that, I am simply emphasizing that before he said that, he said this:

And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.

He is saying that we avoid pain and fear because we want pleasure, not because our primary overriding goal is to avoid pain and fear. If our primary overriding goal were narrowly drawn to constitute avoidance of pain, which is the result of your construction, then the logical result would be suicide, because only through death can we avoid all pain. But the goal of life is pleasure, and we live for pleasure, not for nothingness.

As you say, everyone has to decide for themselves whether their goal is simply to avoid all pain, or whether it is to achieve pleasure even at the cost of some pain. And an excellent test of that question is that posed by Cicero in referencing Hieronymus of Rhodes, from whose doctrine Epicurus is very distinct, but which is the logical conclusion of your position. And that is because the pleasure you describe is only that which is needed to satisfy pains, rather than that pleasure which is the goal of life regardless of the pain required to attain it:

Do you remember, then,” I said, “what Hieronymus of Rhodes pronounces to be the Chief Good, the standard as he conceives it to which all other things should be referred?” “I remember,” said he, “that he considers the End to be freedom from pain.” “Well,” said I, “what is the same philosopher’s view about pleasure?” “He thinks that pleasure is not desirable in itself.” “Then in his opinion to feel pleasure is a different thing from not feeling pain?” “Yes,” he said, “and there he is seriously mistaken, since, as I have just shown, the complete removal of pain is the limit of the increase of pleasure.” “Oh,” I said, “as for the formula ‘freedom from pain,’ I will consider its meaning later on; but unless you are extraordinarily obstinate you are bound to admit that ‘freedom from pain’ does not mean the same as ‘pleasure.’ ”