

Diogenes of Oinoanda And the Timing of Causes

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2022 at 10:51 PM

We are considering the possibility of including this [fragment](#) in the podcast discussion for this week, but it's a difficult one and we need to call for public input. Diogenes argues that this error of the Stoics "more than any other" leads them astray. But I confess this one gets past me, so let's discuss if we can: What is the issue being discussed here?

[Quote from Diogenes of Oinoanda](#)

Fr. 33

Well now, I want to deflect also the error that, along with the feeling of self-love, has you in its grip —an error that, more than any other, further inflates your doctrine as ignorant. The error is this: [not] all causes in things precede their effects, even if the majority do, but some of them precede their effects, others [coincide with] them, and others follow them.

Examples of causes that precede are cautery and surgery saving life: in these cases extreme pain must be borne, and it is after this that pleasure quickly follows.

Examples of coincident causes are [solid] and liquid nourishment and, in addition to these, [sexual acts:] we do not eat [food] and experience pleasure afterwards, nor do we drink wine and experience pleasure afterwards, nor do we emit semen and experience pleasure afterwards; rather the action brings about these pleasures for us immediately, without awaiting the future.

[As for causes that follow, an example is expecting] to win praise after death: although men experience pleasure now because there will be a favourable memory of them after they have gone, nevertheless the cause of the pleasure occurs later.

Now you, being unable to mark off these distinctions, and being unaware that the virtues have a place among the causes that coincide with their effects (for they are borne along with [pleasure]), go completely astray.]

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Whether it is the translation or something else, there is something missing here. I presume that there is a logic controversy of some kind with the Stoics that is probably also being hidden by loose wording or translators who don't understand the issue and so misstate it. Also when I say logic controversy I mean more of an inside baseball stoic technical argument that we don't recognize than a generic logic issue.

I give Diogenes the benefit of the doubt that he was not talking nonsense or in riddles, but in all honesty I can't figure out the point being made here.

Is anyone aware of any articles on this topic or other explanations for what is being discussed here?

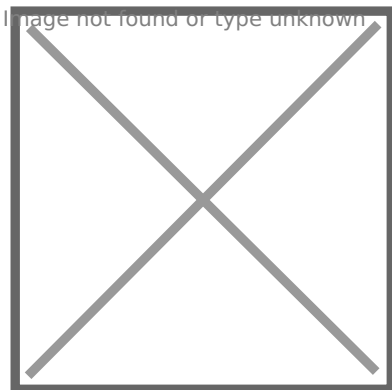
Maybe the word being translated as "causes" has some more subtle meaning? "Motivation" perhaps? That suggestion doesn't seem to be good enough to address the issue. Why were the Stoics even concerned about the timing of causes? And why would the Epicureans have been interested in debating this issue?

Were the Stoics carrying over this argument as to timing of causes from their physics arguments that the universe must have a divine origin / starting point? Perhaps arguing that all "results" (things we observe) must come from prior causes, as an argument against the eternal universe theory (of the Epicureans)?

The issue seems to go to the issue of the nature of virtue and why someone would pursue it, but if there was a Stoic argument about timing that is relevant I am not sure what it is.

Post by "Cassius" of October 11, 2022 at 11:08 PM

Partly answering my own question here is one article and of course (I should have expected) it is by David Sedley:



[Diogenes of Oenoanda on Cyrenaic ethics](#)

Diogenes of Oenoanda on Cyrenaic ethics

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Smith's general idea about the passage is as follows. It is in its entirety an anti-Stoic polemic, and focuses on the Stoic concept of oikeiosis our natural affinity for ourselves and others.

The Stoics, he thinks, are first accused of offering oikeiosis or perhaps more specifically self-love, as a bait to lure people into virtue. Then, after a gap at IV which Smith leaves unreconstructed, they are accused of self-contradiction, in that they reject pleasure, yet at the same time agree with the Epicureans about the reliability of the senses, with Diogenes joking that they do this in order to ensure their own right to take the safest route when climbing crags. The alleged self-contradiction, Smith suggests, lies in the fact that the Stoics deny that pleasure is the end, yet endorse the senses, which in fact (according to the Epicureans, at least) provide the evidence that pleasure is the end. Then starting from V 2 Diogenes, after referring at lines 4-5 to a Stoic doctrine of self-love, adds a new charge: the Stoics think that all causes are antecedent, not realising that some are contemporaneous with their effects and some later than them. Why should this complaint be apposite to the Stoics? Smith's answer is that the Stoics are being accused of failing to grasp the Epicurean insight that virtue is the simultaneous cause of pleasure, and failing to grasp it because they mistakenly think all causes must precede their effects. He accepts the objection that this, if so, is a mistaken interpretation of Stoicism, which certainly held many causes to be contemporaneous with their effects; but he argues that Diogenes is quite capable of misrepresenting his opponents, and that there are Stoic doctrines - such as the doctrine that every event has an antecedent cause - which do lend themselves to the misinterpretation. (Of course, from the authentic Stoic premise that every event has an antecedent cause it does not follow that each event has exclusively antecedent causes. But perhaps Diogenes thought it did, Smith suggests.

Post by "Cassius" of October 11, 2022 at 11:18 PM

OK so the writer of the article is suggesting that the target is not the Stoics but the Cyrenaiacs:

As we have seen, we are looking for a school which shares the Epicurean doctrine that virtue has instrumental value as a cause of pleasure, but which differs in making virtue an antecedent cause of pleasure, itself not intrinsically pleasant but instead related to pleasure more in the way that surgery is (VI 4—11). As far as I can see, the only possible candidates are the Cyrenaiacs. Apart from the Epicureans, they are the only ancient hedonist school, and, more specifically, the only school to recommend virtue on the grounds that it produces pleasure. But given that the Cyrenaiacs share the Epicurean view that arete is of instrumental rather than

intrinsic value, is there enough of a gap between the two schools to permit the present disagreement?

Yes, and a crucial one.

Epicurus insists strongly on the simultaneity and inseparability of virtue and pleasure. As the Epicurean doxography at DL10.138 puts it, 'Epicurus also says that virtue alone is inseparable from pleasure, while other things, such as food, do get separated from it.'

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2022 at 11:25 PM

Sigh. I see I downloaded this article two years ago. Maybe we have already discussed this and I have forgotten. Maybe I should be thinking about old age being the cause that precedes forgetfulness!

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2022 at 8:25 AM

There's a lot of context we appear to be missing, but this struck me:

Quote from Diogenes

Examples of causes that precede are cautery and surgery saving life: in these cases extreme pain must be borne, and it is after this that pleasure quickly follows.

Examples of coincident causes are [solid] and liquid nourishment and, in addition to these, [sexual acts:] we do not eat [food] and experience pleasure afterwards, nor do we drink wine and experience pleasure afterwards, nor do we emit semen and experience pleasure afterwards; rather the action brings about these pleasures for us immediately, without awaiting the future

It seems to my reading that Diogenes is conflating cause/effect and pleasure/pain. Maybe it was a big deal at the time between schools about when pleasure and pain would initiate or motivate action. Surgery without anaesthesia would indeed be accompanied by extreme pain, then if you survive you'll feel pleasure. But is pain a "cause" of the pleasure of recovery? That seems to be where Diogenes is going.

Post by “Cassius” of October 12, 2022 at 8:51 AM

What did you think about what I gather is Sedley's major point, that this is targeted at the Cyrenians and is meant to emphasize the point that virtue brings pleasure as it is engaged in and is not necessarily painful (as the Cyrenians argued)?

To make sense of this I think we have to consider that the Epicureans we're using a more flexible / relativistic definition of "virtue.". (And if that is so then this ends up being good support for the argument that the virtue of the Epicureans is different from the absolute virtue of the other Greeks.)

Post by “Cassius” of October 12, 2022 at 9:29 AM

This is probably a gross oversimplification, but what we have generally understood about the Cyrenians was that they were focused on immediate pleasures (probably more bodily than mental, but possibly both) and they rejected the idea of calculating out over time the expected benefit from activities that in the short term are painful(??)

This seems to be an articulation of the Epicurean response in which Diogenes was emphasizing that current actions can bring important current pleasure even when the physical results of those actions happen far in the future. Sort of a "time preference" analysis in which the emphasis remains on the total expected resulting pain vs pleasure, but which emphasizes that great pleasure can come from current thinking about actions that will produce results that may be greatly delayed in time (and that might not even come until after our death, but that we get great pleasure in thinking forward about them).

By rejecting this idea the Cyrenians were locking themselves into "the pleasure of the moment" while the Epicureans were working toward a much more expansive definition and analysis of total pleasures.

Anyone have a thought on whether that is the direction?

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2022 at 2:15 PM

Quote from Sedley

Epicurus insists strongly on the simultaneity and inseparability of virtue and pleasure. As the Epicurean doxography at DL10.138 puts it, 'Epicurus also says that virtue alone is inseparable from pleasure, while other things, such as food, do get separated from it.'

Ah, I see what you're referring to, [Cassius](#) . I'm going to have to dig into the paper.

Post by “Don” of October 12, 2022 at 2:22 PM

Quote from Sedley

The inseparability of virtue from pleasure, on which Epicurus insisted, lies rather in the fact that the virtues, properly understood, are the skills of pleasure management, both short term and long term. Crucially, present pleasure can be derived from one's confident expectations about future pleasure. Thus if courage, justice and the other virtues are outlooks which exclude all fear of future pain and free you to look forward confidently to future pleasure, their very possession becomes pleasurable. Could the Cyrenaics be interpreted as holding the mistaken view which Diogenes

opposes to the Epicurean one, namely that virtue is merely the antecedent cause of pleasure, analogous to accepting painful surgery now for the sake of future pleasure? I am confident that they could,...

Post by “Cassius” of October 12, 2022 at 2:25 PM

Also FWIW It gives me great pleasure to watch David Sedley dive into these Epicurean ideas and come up with rational and sympathetic understandings of them. Seems to me that Sedley richly deserves to be considered one of the greatest living positive forces for Epicurean understanding, along with MFS, and it's fascinating to watch when Sedley can exceed even MFS in sympathetic interpretation.

Post by “Cassius” of October 12, 2022 at 2:28 PM

I also really like the implications of this sentence;

"The inseparability of virtue from pleasure, on which Epicurus insisted, lies rather in the fact that the virtues, properly understood, are the skills of pleasure management, both short term and long term."

That "properly understood" hints that he is going in the same direction of seeing Epicurean virtue as tied tightly to practical success in achieving pleasure / avoiding pain, rather than in an absolutist definition. What some allege to be courage may in fact in the Epicurean view be foolhardiness if the action is not properly calculated to lead to happy living.

Post by "Don" of October 12, 2022 at 2:31 PM

It makes my exploration of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics all the more interesting!