

PD10 - Interpretations of PD 10 Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of January 16, 2021 at 9:21 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

As Epicurus says in his philosophy as a whole, nothing stands above pleasure. As far as the "profligate" of PD 10 are experiencing pleasure, there can be no argument or censure against whatever activities they choose to engage in. PD 10 is only saying that the "profligate" can be censured in so far as they aren't experiencing the fullness of pleasure because they still have the "mind's fears about astronomical phenomena and death and suffering." If they would resolve these pains and fears and come to a correct understanding of these, they could engage in any of the activities which bring them pleasure without anxiety

I would rewrite that as follows:

As Epicurus says in his philosophy as a whole, nothing stands above pleasure as the ultimate good, which means the ultimate good or goal for which we do everything else to achieve, and which is not in terms an intermediate step toward any higher goal. As far as the "profligate" of PD 10 are experiencing pleasure, there can be no argument or censure against whatever activities they choose to engage in if in fact those activities succeed in bringing them pleasure which they feel to outweigh the pain which may be required to achieve that pleasure. This is because any legitimate censure would have to be based on them failing to achieve the ultimate goal of nature, and if they do in fact achieve that goal, there is no natural grounds for censuring them. PD 10 is only saying that the "profligate" can be censured to the extent that they fail to achieve their goal, which in practical human experience is likely to happen if their profligate ways do not banish the "mind's fears about astronomical phenomena and death and suffering." If their profligate ways included a means of resolving these and all other pains and fears, there would be no proper /natural grounds for censuring them because they were in fact successful in achieving a pleasurable life.

Now a couple of comments:

(1) I think it's clear that what I am doing is taking "pleasure is the goal" to its logical extreme and presuming that this is a hypothetical profligate man who is hypothesized (against the odds of general experience) to in fact be successful in achieving a pleasurable life. Anyone who looks at [PD10](#) and insists on saying that the profligate man "cannot" be successful, and analyzing it that way, is in my view not accepting this as the hypothetical it seems clearly intended to be. Taking such a position, such a person won't ever accept the conclusion I think [PD10](#) was aimed

at communicating, so I think anyone analyzing this has to deal with whether and how to treat this as a hypothetical. So my position is that [PD10](#) is taking the same logical/hypothetical approach entailed in the Torquatus section of On Ends:

"I will start then in the manner approved by the author of the system himself, by settling what are the essence and qualities of the thing that is the object of our inquiry; not that I suppose you to be ignorant of it, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil."

(2) Clarity also requires that we make clear that there is the time issue. Epicurus said in the letter to Menoeceus that the wise man isn't going to choose the longest life, but the most pleasant, so it needs to be clear that the profligate man isn't necessarily wrong because he experiences pains "longer" than he experiences pleasure. If the letter to Menoeceus is correct, then we have to let the individual involved judge whether the pleasure achieved is worth the cost in pain / effort of achieving it.

(3) Just as with point two we have to take a position on whether Epicurus was saying that it is more important to eliminate pain than it is to achieve pleasure. If you take the position that Epicurus was advising real people to place first priority on eliminating pain, in order to have the best life possible to a human, then you're going to slide to asceticism and minimalism. I would even argue that you're impelled toward eventual suicide at a relatively young age, before the inevitable pains of middle and older age set in. Of course I take the opposite position, and think Epicurus was saying that just as we don't choose the longest life, but the most pleasant, we don't choose the most pain-free life, but the most pleasant.