

PD10 - Interpretations of PD 10 Discussion

Post by "Cassius" of January 16, 2021 at 10:54 PM

Thanks Don -

I think we end up in the same place because of the practicalities of human life.

However I would say that the practical approach alone would undercut the meaning of these two:

PD8: " No pleasure is a bad thing in itself; but the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures."

and from the letter to Menoeceus:

"Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided."

It seems to me that Epicurus is clearly wishing to establish as a flat principle that "pleasure" is an unalloyed good and is to be accepted as such in the philosophic scheme as an absolute premise of all other conclusions that might follow from that premise.

If we look at [PD10](#) solely from the "practical" point of view alone, it seems to me that we imply, or at least open up the logical possibility, that pleasure can lose its nature as good in certain contexts -- namely the context in which the cost of such pleasure is large in terms of the pain required in order to achieve it. I would submit that labeling pleasure "good" or "not good" is not at all the same as saying pleasure is to be "chosen" or not chosen," so I am suggesting that Epicurus is telling us to keep these two aspects in mind as distinctly separate.

This seems to me to present a significant problem in analyzing the original question as set by Torquatus, (who cites it as something on which all philosophers, presumably even Epicurus, agree) which is that of specifying the highest good toward which all else aims, and which is itself not the means to something else. If you are suggesting that pleasure may at times not be a good at all, then you are pretty clearly opening up the field to say that if pleasure cannot be relied on to always be good, then you have to value something else (presumably wisdom or prudence) as higher than pleasure, since you need wisdom / prudence to know when to choose pleasure. Plato will back you into a corner and you will end up admitting, as did [Philebus](#), that there is something more important for you to have than pleasure.

On the other hand, the more absolute position suggested by Elayne and me would (I submit) have it both ways. You would be affirming the practical conclusion (that it is necessary to watch choices carefully) both experimentally and reasonably according to your definitions.

I seem to remember that there is at least one reference but possibly more than one in Lucretius to a position being doubly potent, or perhaps it is "cutting off all retreat." I can't say I am 100% sure that Lucretius was thinking of that in this context, but this discussion is causing me to be more convinced than ever that Epicurus should be read as linking the experiential with the logical and fighting on both fronts. I suppose it's not "necessary" to fight on the logical level if someone is the type of supremely practical person who isn't bothered by logical problems, but I personally am convinced that the Epicurus was committed not to abandoning logical arguments, but to showing how they can be used properly in conjunction with experience.

Probably someone arguing this position would also cite [PD16](#) as evidence of Epicurus not abandoning reason, but pointing to its proper use:

[PD16](#). In but few things chance hinders a wise man, but the greatest and most important matters, reason has ordained, and throughout the whole period of life does and will ordain.

Presuming that you or Elayne may assert it, I will continue to agree with you that it is legitimate to find it unnecessary to engage in logical debates at all. Some people can successfully go through life not worrying about certain issues, effectively saying "to heck with Plato and his arguments." But I think the evidence is overwhelming that Epicurus didn't just teach his students to ignore Plato and tell them that the Platonists that totally wrong to think about logical reasoning. I would say instead that he showed his students a logical way to reach his conclusions based on the combined use of reason and evidence.

Note: Looks like i am thinking of a passage in Book 3 (perhaps in the mid-400's) which Munro translates as:

"So invariably is truth found to make head against false reason and to cut off all retreat from the assailant, and by a two-fold refutation to put falsehood to rout."

Bailey: "So surely is true fact seen to run counter to false reasoning, and to shut off retreat from him who flees, and with double-edged refutation to prove the falsehood."

Browne: "So evidently does the true matter of fact overthrow all false reasoning, that there is no possibility to escape its force; and the contrary opinion is either way fully refuted."

More context for that passage is here: [Episode Forty-Three - The Mind is Born, Grows Old, and Dies With the Body](#)