

Review of the "What is Epicureanism and Is It Compatible with Stoicism?" video by Vox Stoica

Post by "Cassius" of August 7, 2021 at 2:43 PM

Further as to Jefferson, presuming this is his own handwriting this is a key part of his letter to William Short - his "outline" at the end of the letter. To me he seems to clearly get that "utility is the test of virtue" correctly, but it worries me that he isn't then also clear (utility toward what? - to which the answer should be 'pleasure' in the full context that Epicurus places it).

Then in combination with "happiness the aim of life" he is again muddying the identification of happiness with pleasure, but you can cut him slack there for following the passage in the letter to Menoecus. But while Epicurus then proceeds to articulate the clear central role of pleasure, Jefferson really doesn't.

By the time Jefferson gets to stating that the summum bonum is not to be pained in body or troubled in mind, he has pretty well botched the clear statement in "On Ends" (which he surely read) identifying the summum bonum as pleasure. He has also contradicted his conclusion in the head and heart letter, and much of the implication of what he has previously written in the same letter to William Short.

It's as if we're seeing in Jefferson's writing the same wrestling we continue to have today about how to state these issues clearly, and that Jefferson himself left the issues unclear. Of course he wasn't writing a philosophical treatise, so again I cut him a lot of slack, but I am afraid he was doing exactly what we tend to do try -- trying to make the issue more palatable to orthodox case by intentionally putting a gloss on the role of "pleasure" -- something I don't think Epicurus himself was guilty of doing, despite the controversial passages of the letter to Menoecus that "can" be read in that direction.

