

Torquatus' Statement of the Epicurean View Of The Ultimate Good In "On Ends"

Post by "Cassius" of October 5, 2021 at 12:04 PM

I think I am now repeating myself but every time I read this paragraph I come back to it wondering exactly what is going on. So now I can wonder about the Reid version:

Quote

[39] But actually at Athens, as my father used to tell me, when he wittily and humorously ridiculed the Stoics, there is in the Ceramicus a statue of Chrysippus, sitting with his hand extended, which hand indicates that he was fond of the following little argument: *Does your hand, being in its present condition, feel the lack of anything at all? Certainly of nothing. But if pleasure were the supreme good, it would feel a lack. I agree. Pleasure then is not the supreme good.* My father used to say that even a statue would not talk in that way, if it had power of speech. The inference is shrewd enough as against the Cyrenaics, but does not touch Epicurus. For if the only pleasure were that which, as it were, tickles the senses, if I may say so, and attended by sweetness overflows them and insinuates itself into them, neither the hand nor any other member would be able to rest satisfied with the absence of pain apart from a joyous activity of pleasure. But if it is the highest pleasure, as Epicurus believes, to be in no pain, then the first admission, that the hand in its then existing condition felt no lack, was properly made to you, Chrysippus, but the second improperly, I mean that it would have felt a lack had pleasure been the supreme good. It would certainly feel no lack, and on this ground, that anything which is cut off from the state of pain is in the state of pleasure.

I am all in favor of wittily ridiculing the Stoics, but am I the only one who finds Chrysippus' witticism hard to follow?

Is it necessary to feel a lack of it (when it is absent) in order to identify something as the supreme good?

Or maybe there's some entirely different point.

I certainly think I understand the issue on how the Cyreniac position differs from Epicurus, in that the Cyreniacs considered only "active/ joy/delight" to be pleasure, while Epicurus' definition of pleasure is more wide so as to include any feeling which is not pain, but it's just not clear to me that it is obvious that we would feel the lack of the supreme good if it is missing.

The unstated premise must be something about **the supreme good must be present and available at all times or else it is missed?** (And maybe that's reference back to the Platonic continuity issue that led Epicurus to his "continuous pleasure" statement.)

But regardless of that the Epicureans must have thought this illustration was helpful and important, and I think in order for us to see it so we need to articulate what exactly is going on.