

Differences between Epicureanism and Cyrenaicism

Post by "Cassius" of November 5, 2021 at 8:27 AM

Quote

To claim that pleasure is good, then, does not mean imagining that all pleasures are equally good (Jones, 1989: 49-50).

OK right off the bat I say to that writer -- NO! Clearly Epicurus says that all pleasure are good, and all pains are bad -- yes you have to drill down, but this is where I think Godfrey is clearly correct because now the emphasis is on choiceworthiness and desire, but that doesn't mean that they still aren't "good" in the sense of pleasing. I know that we are now going down the rabbit hole of the meaning of "good," but in these philosophical discussions I strongly think that unless we generally refer to "good" as meaning "good in itself" then we never get anywhere in being clear.

Quote

Epicureans therefore distinguished between two categories (Mitsis, 1988: 45-51; Preuss, 1994: Ch. 6).

I also of course question this. D.L. did so, per the quote above. Cicero did so. But show me an instance of an authoritative EPICUREAN doing that distinguishing.

As I read the rest of that I won't comment in as much detail other than to say that I don't doubt that Mil and Bentham were struggling with their formulations because they where in fact trying to distinguish higher and lower pleasures - which means that they were looking for a standard other than pleasure itself.

Unfortunately I have to say that the entire analysis of that excerpt strikes me as totally disastrous, for the reason that is explained amply in [Philebus](#).

Once anyone starts down the road of saying that some pleasures are "more good" or "higher" or "lower" than others, then you are introducing into the discussion the strong implication that there is another standard - a standard outside of pleasure itself, by which you can rank pleasures into "more good" or "less good" or "higher" or "lower" or "more noble" or "less noble." You are then inevitably led to the conclusion that the "art of distinguishing the higher from the lower" is more important than pleasure itself. And what is the "art of distinguishing the higher and the lower"? Of course it's WISDOM (even call it PRUDENCE if you like) -- which are VIRTUES -- and you are led to conclude, as [Philebus](#) surrendered and concluded, that wisdom is the true target of life and not pleasure.

This thread is advancing my thoughts on this topic for the reason I stated to Kalosyni: *"We all can feel at times what it means to "rest" and to have a "good attitude" and a "positive outlook" and similar emotions and feelings. We know that those are important to us, and so when we read (from the commentators!!!) that Epicurus was really interested in "resting" pleasures, we presume "Oh that makes sense and I totally agree!" and we end up endorsing the "kinetic / katastematic distinction" as if it were a really important part of Epicurean philosophy."*

So I strongly think that was these commentators are doing. They are so immersed into the "psychological" or even "clinical" perspective that they assure themselves that because they identify in their own minds background feelings which they think are important, and they want to find that in Epicurus, they grasp at these few lines from DL and from Epicurus and say *"See, this is where the Epicureans said what we modern psychologists say!"* But they are trying to graft that psychological viewpoint on top of the foundational philosophic battle over these words and goals that was going on between Stoics and Epicureans after Epicurus himself was long dead. The danger in doing so is that if you start playing around with the debate about "the good" (which is what so much of Greek philosophy was all about) by changing it around to fit one's views of psychology, then you make it impossible to see what the foundational argument was all about.

We're continuing to go back and forth on this issue of whether pleasures can be "ranked" in our individual lives, or chosen between in daily life. Of course they can and should be chosen between, all pleasures are not exactly the same in every respect. But the very definition of pleasure is that it "feels good" to us and if some fundamental meaning is put on "good" of the "feels good" other than "pleasant," then you're implying that there is a standard outside and superior to pleasure.

So I assert that it is foundational that "all pleasures are good" and that cannot convey any meaning other than that "all pleasures are pleasing." It makes sense to say "some pleasures are more pleasing than others" because that is how we feel them to be (duration, intensity, etc). But to vaguely say that "some pleasures are more good than others" implies that there is a standard of choiceworthiness other than how pleasing they are.

Yes in strictly Epicurean terms we can define "pleasing" and "good" to mean exactly the same thing, and we can use those words interchangeably.

But the world is full of Stoics and Platonists and Peripatetics, and they assuredly do NOT mean "pleasing" and "good" to mean exactly the same thing. We as Epicureans are a very small minority, and if we don't make this distinction clear then we get swept up in the tide of Platonism and lose any claim to distinctiveness.

So the concluding lines of that excerpt are in my mind pure Platonism/Stoicism: "What matters is not just what we do but the reasons why we do what we do (Jones, 1989: 51)." That's where you end up, just like [Philebus](#), when you decide to rank pleasures as "lower" or "higher" on a scale outside of pleasure itself (Lower or higher here implying "less noble" or "more noble.")

I would say strongly no to that last sentence of the excerpt -- "the reasons why we do what we do" rings of "virtue" ---What matters is not the "reason" (our understanding of "wisdom" or of "why") but the actual practical result - whether our lives are pleasing or not. Yes we want wisdom in order to produce pleasure, but what "matters" is the result (pleasure) not the too (wisdom).