

Philebus: The Problem With Trying To Separate Pleasure From Wisdom

Post by "Cassius" of September 24, 2016 at 3:11 PM

[Cassius Amicus](#)

[September 22 at 9:17am](#)

Someone (I think [Theo Kouk](#); pardon if I am incorrect) recently criticized Socrates/Plato for asserting that wisdom and pleasure could be separated from one another. Here is the way that argument was presented in [Philebus](#), which also shows why Plato wanted to do it:

SOCRATES: Now let us part off the life of pleasure from the life of wisdom, and pass them in review.

PROTARCHUS: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: Let there be no wisdom in the life of pleasure, nor any pleasure in the life of wisdom, for if either of them is the chief good, it cannot be supposed to want anything, but if either is shown to want anything, then it cannot really be the chief good.

PROTARCHUS: Impossible.

If you grant Plato the presumption that something such as "wisdom" can exist apart from pleasure, then you have already lost the argument. That's because Plato is asserting that wisdom exists "on its own" or "in the air" or however you want to say it, The Epicurean answer should be "full stop" at that point without letting the argument go further. The burden is on Plato to prove the nonexistent, and it is ridiculous to grant him that "wisdom" has a separate existence at the beginning. Because if we look at nature and observe that the only faculty of choice given to all animals is pleasure and pain, then you have eliminated any kind of abstraction such as "wisdom" as a third goal.

And so once we see the necessity of not stipulating that any abstract goal exists separate from pleasure, does that not further explain PD5? "It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking, when, for instance, the man is not able to live wisely, though he lives honorably and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life."

"Wisdom" and "honor" and "justice" do not exist on their own, apart from pleasure. They do not happen to mystically be united with pleasure by some outside force, which is what the "Stoicizers" want to argue. When we remember that pleasure and pain, in all their many forms but still as pleasure and pain, are the only two motivations given by nature, then we see that "Wisdom" and "honor" and "justice" have no separate existence, but only as terms to describe certain specific relationships that support pleasure in a particular time and place among particular people.