

Collecting Ancient Instances of the Argument: "Pleasure Cannot Be The Highest Good Because It Has No Limit"

Post by "Joshua" of December 29, 2021 at 10:27 PM

Quote

As I interpret the argument, the theory was that if something is perfect then why would it increase? Sort of like adding an extra note or phrase to a musical composition can ruin the "perfect" composition. Hence the limit of pleasure as specified by Epicurus.

I wanted to flesh out my question more fully, particularly in light of what Godfrey has written here.

I can accept the basic argument that the hypothetically "perfect" can want (i.e. *lack*) nothing. What I cannot quite grasp is why an imperfect being (the human), arising from imperfect beginnings and employing imperfect means, must necessarily have as its aim something perfect. I think that Epicurus' solution to this Pythagorean/Platonic problem is a clever one, but at my current level of understanding I slightly wish that he had cut down that argument instead of trying to supply an adequate solution.

Nevertheless, I'm quite happy to acknowledge that this *was* actually the course he chose to take. Now I'm trying to better understand why he chose to take it. Since it recurs in almost all of the core texts, he must have felt that it was important.

I suspect that the answer has something to do with his conception of the gods; in paraphrase, 'they do not trouble us because their perfect happiness prevents them from wanting or needing to trouble us'.

Although here too, I confess that I am somewhat wistful about yet another missed chance...

Come to think of it, almost all of the parts of Epicurean Philosophy that are controversial even among Epicureans, from tranquility to his view of the size of the sun, hinge on these two premises of perfection and limitation. 🤔

Am I overstating that case? (Probably! 😞)