

From The "Golden Mean" to the "Summum Bonum" - Useful or Deceptive Frames of Reference?

Post by "Cassius" of February 17, 2022 at 7:36 AM

I don't know that what Don and I are saying is really that different. The word "pleasure" is just like any other word - it is a placeholder for innumerable numbers of individual pleasures which we have to decide to choose or avoid. It is only one among several starting points for action, which is what I mean as "answering the philosophical question."

Obviously it's tremendously important to do that properly, because the major alternatives are "virtue," "piety," and "logic" (maybe I would add "nothingness" if we want to include certain other viewpoints). And yes I agree that answering that question is tremendously important so as not to associate with the wrong people and so as to know how to answer the question when it comes up. Identifying the greatest good solves those problems for us. It tells us to which school we should belong. And of course that is tremendously important.

But we still arrive at the same point once we identify "Pleasure is the Greatest Good:" because the daily question that has to be answered moment by moment is "What next?"

My view as to why Don and I seem to be dancing around but not appearing to agree is that we don't at this point have the same attitude toward the "role of logic" question. I think Epicurus considered the Platonic / Aristotelian assertions of "logic" to be equally as deadly as the arbitrary assertions of religions, and that he was arguing against both with similar intensity. Even though Plato and Aristotle did believe in their gods, their error was not primarily one of religion - it was the way they were applying their logic. Therefore I think Epicurus saw TWO major enemies of right thinking, religion and improper use of logic, and what I am trying to do is to bring out that side of what he was attacking and what he was saying.

Just as with "gods" and "[all sensations are true](#)" and the subtleties of "absence of pain" (and probably more terms if I thought about it longer) I think that "pleasure" and "greatest good" have to be parsed for their deeper meaning and not taken at face value. Saying "pleasure is the greatest good" in his time was filled with implications that need to be brought and, rather than treated as if that formulation answers every question.

To repeat Wright, in a passage where I think she was right in seeing this in Epicurus:

"In the schools you have hitherto frequented," she continued, addressing the youth, "certain images of virtue, vice, truth, knowledge, are presented to the imagination, and these abstract qualities, or we may call them, figurative beings, are made at once the objects of speculation and adoration. A law is laid down, and the feelings and opinions of men are predicated upon it; a theory is built, and all animate and inanimate nature is made to speak in its support; an

hypothesis is advanced, and all the mysteries of nature are treated as explained."

And I don't consider this to be a "fight" in any way between me and Don but an extremely helpful way to get at some issues that I am not sure I previously recognized.

In the past I was criticized (not here) by harping too much on pleasure, and I hope to always continue to be criticized for that because I think that "pleasure" is the ultimate answer to these questions. But going into it as deeply as we are doing helps us understand (i think) where Plato and Aristotle and the Stoics were wrong and have to be attacked.

They weren't just wrong because they attacked Pleasure, they were wrong in their reasons for attacking it, which involved not just religion but their logic and/or their implications as to their logical analysis of "The Good." They didn't base their attack on Pleasure as "I attack it because Zeus told me so." They based their attack on Pleasure on a logical framework which Epicurus found to be in error.