

Perspectives On "Proving" That Pleasure is "The Good"

Post by "Don" of December 21, 2022 at 8:57 AM

[Quote from Todd](#)

I don't think I'm going to budge on this.

I respect your conviction.

[Quote from Todd](#)

Pleasure isn't just a good.

What would you call it then? And that's not meant as sarcasm! I'm just wanting to see what word you'd use to describe it.

[Quote from Todd](#)

You can't even talk about goods until you have a standard to determine what is a good anyway.

I've found it instructive to always go back to the source texts and the words used. When anyone - Aristotle, Epicurus, et al. - talked about "good" or "the good" as it's uniformly translated into English, the words used are αγαθός (agathos) "good" and τᾶγαθον (tagathon, basically the previous word with the definite article "the" bound to it) "the good."

I looked at the LSJ (THE standard reference for ancient Greek) definition for αγαθός:

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἀγα^θός](#)

What I found instructive was the various connotations of that word:

II. of things,

1. good, serviceable
2. of outward circumstances, to good purpose,
3. morally good
4. ἀγαθόν, τό, good, blessing, benefit, of persons or things; as term of endearment for a baby, blessing!, treasure!; confer a benefit on . . . ;—in pl., ἀγαθά, τά, goods of fortune, treasures,

wealth; "ἀγαθὰ πράττειν" fare well; also, good things, dainties: good qualities; good points, of a horse.

To me, what it's getting at are "What things in life or this world confer benefit? What do we consider to provide a service to us?"

With these connotations, Epicurus seems to me to say wisdom, morality, and justice are goods because they provide the benefit of our living pleasurable lives.

But they aren't the end of goods. Pleasure is that to which all other goods point or end up - all other things that provide benefit to our lives ultimately do so because they provide us with pleasure.

So he uses τᾶγαθόν when he talks about the expansiveness of pleasure here:

Fragment 67. I do not think I could conceive of the good (τᾶγαθόν) without the joys of taste, of sex, of hearing, and without the pleasing motions caused by the sight of bodies and forms.