

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

Post by "Todd" of December 22, 2022 at 2:00 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

1. This seems like exactly the type of rabbit hole that Cicero cleverly led to in his discussion of Epicurus.

After reading Torquatus (I will admit that I didn't get all the way through), I didn't get the impression that Cicero was cleverly misleading his readers. OTOH, maybe he was just very good at it!

Rather, I felt that he was trying to give an accurate impression of contemporary Epicurean views...and the Epicureans were still not clear on all these things themselves.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

2. Todd you have mentioned repeatedly that in this thread you are only discussing ethics. I think that that's a mistake, because there's no Epicurean ethics without the physics. To me, separating the two is in this instance an error of dialectics, which can be useful for winning arguments but not terribly useful in gaining a complete understanding of a subject.

I knew someone would bring this up.

1. I completely understand that the ethics depends on the physics.
2. I assume that all of us here more or less agree on the physics, to the extent that they are relevant to this discussion.
3. We are already trying to discuss too many things at the same time in this thread, as you yourself point out.
4. My point about limiting the discussion to ethics (and further to a very specific part of ethics) is not to ignore things that are relevant, but to keep the conversation sufficiently focused that we might establish some things that we agree on and can refer back to in the future, or at least figure out precisely what our disagreements are.
5. I feel like as we work our way through the issues, if we are disagreeing due to a different ideas about the physics, then that will become apparent, and then of course it would be highly relevant to discuss.
6. At a higher level, I don't think (this is only my opinion) there is some bright line where physics stops and ethics starts (for Epicureans). It is not just dependent, it is inextricable.

But that doesn't mean every conversation has to start from very first principles.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)


3. In light of 2, I think that we all agree that pleasure is the positive/attractive part of the faculty of Feelings. As such, a prudent understanding of one's feelings and desires is the core of Epicurean ethics.

Yes, of course.

However, saying things in such a general way that no one could possibly disagree and still call themselves an Epicurean is not interesting to me (possibly a personal failing).

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

4. Pleasure is good. It's a good. It's The Good. It feels good. It's everything described in the previous 138 posts.

 for the clever way of putting that.

But this strikes me as a rather bland, (somewhat) non-controversial flavor of Epicureanism. I would like to be able to make stronger claims, and to do that, you have to be very clear on what words actually mean and how concepts relate. Again, this is possibly a personal failing of mine.

I really do appreciate the way you phrased that though.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

5. From my perspective, there seem to be three things being discussed in this thread: a) parsing the concept "good," b) trying to gain a clear grasp of Epicurean philosophy, and c) coming to a way of presenting the philosophy to others. If I'm correct in this, it might be helpful to put a) into one thread and b) and c) into another thread. Combining them all, at least for me, is creating a lot of confusion. If new terminology is necessary, I think it would best derive from a discussion of the intent of the philosophy, from general to specific. Parsing the meaning of specific ancient words is important, but needs to be done in a very specific context. And, at least for me, the specificity of that context seems uncertain in this thread.

a) concept of "good"

This is what I wanted to focus on in this thread. More specifically, the relationship of good(s) and pleasure.

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b) clear grasp of Epicurean philosophy:

c) presenting philosophy

Either of those things would be a tall order for a single thread!

I mentioned those things for context, to explain why I was trying to focus on certain things, and especially to explain why I said in a few places that I did NOT want to get into certain subjects.

I'm happy to discuss other topics elsewhere, but I had a sense of where I was trying to get to with this thread, and I felt that introducing other concepts would just open up entirely new areas of disagreement when there was a very specific disagreement that I wanted to get to the bottom of.

New terminology is actually something I want to avoid. But also I want words to mean what people expect them to mean in a given context.

Refuting an argument of Plato or commenting on Aristotle is one thing. Finding out that Highest Good and highest good might not mean the same thing - that is something else! Language should be an aid to understanding, not a hindrance.