

The Definitive "Chrysippus' Hand Argument" Thread

Post by "Don" of April 18, 2023 at 10:07 PM

I'm going to break down this dialogue (C for Chryssipus; S for Stooge):

C: Does your hand, being in its present condition, feel the lack of anything at all?

S: Certainly of nothing.

C: But if pleasure were the supreme good, it would feel a lack.

S: I agree.

C: Pleasure then is not the supreme good.

For good measure, here's the Latin:

—'Numquidnam manus tua sic affecta, quem ad modum affecta nunc est, desiderat?'

—Nihil sane.

—'At, si voluptas esset bonum, desideraret.'

—Ita credo.

— "Non est igitur voluptas bonum."

That's it. That's the whole "story." Here's my response:

Your hand doesn't "feel" anything. You may sense something with your hand, on your hand, in your hand, and so on; but your hand, in its present condition, is merely a part of your sensory apparatus. If you feel that your hand doesn't lack anything, it's in homeostasis. It is in balance. That balance is pleasurable by definition because it is not painful. You are already feeling pleasure in your hand. Chryssipus is simply not accepting Epicurus's premise that there is only pleasure and pain, and then forging ahead to make a point regardless of Epicurus's position.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That one characteristic of the supreme good is that it is always present and - if absent - that the presence would be felt immediately?

The supreme good is not always present. It is that to which all other actions aim for. We are always striving to achieve the supreme good. Chryssipus is saying that if the hand didn't "want" anything, if it didn't "want" pleasure, then pleasure can't be the supreme good because we should always strive to gain the supreme good. Epicurus would say that the feeling of freedom

from pain IS pleasurable, is pleasure, and so "the hand" IS already experiencing the supreme good which is pleasure.