

The Definitive "Chrysippus' Hand Argument" Thread

Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2023 at 12:04 PM

IF (and I am not taking that as established) we were to conclude that the issue Chrysippus is alluding to is that the guide or the greatest good must be continuously present (for some combination of practical or philosophical reasons that we still need to clarify) , then we have DeWitt's explanation of the "continuity" issue in the following clips.

It boils down to:

hedonism as a practical code of conduct for mankind. No philosophy that offered merely intermittent intervals of pleasure would have possessed any broad or cogent appeal for those in quest of the happy life.

The argument is most fully stated in the section "Pleasure can be Continuous" on page 239. Here are two isolated references, then part of the section devoted to the topic so people can

THE NATURAL CEILINGS OF PLEASURE

Having established body and soul upon a parity, equal partners in life, Epicurus next proceeded to propound a number of paradoxes: first, that limits of pleasure were set by Nature, beyond which no increase was possible; second, that pleasure was one and not many; and third, that **continuous** pleasure was possible. These new doctrines were the offspring of controversy, because the contrary doctrines had been sponsored by Plato and his followers, who in this instance agreed for the most part with the multitude.

It is plain to see how Epicurus was led to switch emphasis to this aspect of pleasure. As usual, he was working his way to greater precision in his analysis of the subject and, as will presently be shown in more detail, he discerned that according to Aristippus and Plato no such thing as **continuous** pleasure was possible; they recognized only peaks of pleasure separated by intervals either devoid of pleasure or neutral or mixed. From this it followed with inevitable logic that the wise man could not be happy at all times. This conclusion was repugnant to Epicurus as a thoroughgoing hedonist and was repudiated. This repudiation could be made good only by vindicating for freedom from fear and pain the status of a positive pleasure. This in turn resulted in a doctrine of the unity of all pleasure.

The apex of the new structure of ethics erected by Epicurus consists in the teaching that pleasure can be continuous. The discovery of a logical basis for this proposition was essential for the promulgation of hedonism as a practical code of conduct for mankind. No philosophy that offered merely intermittent intervals of pleasure would have possessed any broad or cogent appeal for those in quest of the happy life.

The predecessors of Epicurus had spent considerable thought upon the analysis of pleasure, but their attitude was in the main merely analytical and academic, lacking relevance to action. Their zeal was not for promoting the happiness of mankind. They were rather in the position of men who give themselves to the study of anatomy without contemplating the practice of medicine. The attitude of Epicurus, on the contrary, was pragmatic from the beginning. The declaration that "Vain is the word of that philosopher by which no malady of mankind is healed" has already been quoted.⁵¹

The desired logical basis for the continuity of pleasure was afforded by the discovery of natural ceilings of pleasures. From this is derived the division into basic and ornamental or superfluous pleasures, corresponding respectively to natural and necessary desires and those that are neither natural nor necessary. Hunger and thirst exemplify the

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the second class. Correspondingly, the satisfaction of normal hunger and thirst is a basic pleasure while the gratification of abnormal desires for rich foods and drinks is ornamental and superfluous.

This recognition of basic pleasures, in its turn, signified the recognition of a normal state of being, consisting of health of mind and of body and freedom from fears and all unnecessary desires, which was called ataraxy or serenity. This condition was denominated static, but allowance must be made for a certain variation. Hunger and thirst recur and call for satisfaction, which is a moderately kinetic pleasure, whereupon the individual returns to the normal state of absence of pain. Epicurus describes it in one of those reciprocal statements for which he had a preference: "Only then have we need of pleasure when from the absence of pleasure we feel pain, and when we do not feel pain we no longer feel need of pleasure."⁵² While these words have reference to the natural desires of the body, the description of the normal state must be understood to include freedom from pain in the body and distress in the mind.

The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument,⁵³ but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings

would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

Even at the present day the same objection is raised. For instance, a modern Platonist, ill informed on the true intent of Epicurus, has this to say: "What, in a word, is to be said of a philosophy that begins by regarding pleasure as the only positive good and ends by emptying pleasure of all positive content?"⁵⁴ This ignores the fact that this was but one of the definitions of pleasure offered by Epicurus, that he recognized kinetic as well as static pleasures. It ignores also the fact that Epicurus took personal pleasure in public festivals and encouraged

240

THE NEW HEDONISM

his disciples to attend them and that regular banquets were a part of the ritual of the sect. Neither does it take account of the fact that in the judgment of Epicurus those who feel the least need of luxury enjoy it most and that intervals of abstinence enhance the enjoyment of luxury.⁵⁵ Thus the Platonic objector puts upon himself the necessity of denying that the moderation of the rest of the year furnishes additional zest to the enjoyment of the Christmas dinner; he has failed to become aware of the Epicurean zeal for "condensing pleasure."

On a level with this criticism is the allegation of a more recent writer that Epicurus put himself in a corner by defining pleasure as freedom from pain.⁵⁶ It was not Epicurus who put himself in a corner but rather Aristippus and Plato, who by recognizing only peaks of pleasure separated by intervals either void of pleasure or neutral or mixed, rendered all continuity of pleasure impossible and consequently all continuity