

## The Definitive "Chrysippus' Hand Argument" Thread

all continuity of pleasure impossible and consequently all continuity of happiness. The error of the modern critic is to allow ancient controversy to vitiate the independence of modern judgments. The ancient enemies of Epicureanism were not concerned to present a total estimate of its teachings; they pounced upon those doctrines which, when considered singly, seemed susceptible of refutation or ridicule. They kept harping upon the negative description of pleasure as freedom from pain and ignored the positive aspect as health of mind and health of body. The latter, being difficult to attack, is lacking from the hostile testimonies and survives only anonymously in the friendly tradition.

It would have been strange if this doctrine of continuous happiness were absent from the Authorized Doctrines. Its presence is easily overlooked, because the context of the controversy has become blurred with the lapse of time, but the emphasis derived from prominence of position must have been at one time arresting. It forms part of the famous tetrapharmacon, Doctrine 3. The first part, already quoted, identifies the basic pleasure as freedom from pain, the only kind that could be continuous: "The removal of all pain is the limit of magnitude for pleasures." This rules out the "neutral state" as postulated by Plato; it identifies the neutral state as one of static pleasure. The second part of the Doctrine disposes of Plato's "mixed states": "And wherever the experience of pleasure is present, so long as it prevails, there is no pain or distress or a combination of them." This amounts to denying that pain and pleasure are capable of mixing and of resulting in a state that is different from either. Epicurus implies instead and elsewhere

teaches that pain is subtractable from pleasure, leaving a balance of the latter.<sup>57</sup> This principle applies either to physical pain or mental distress or to both together. It is essential to the thesis that continuous pleasure is possible.

Those who denied that pleasure was the telos were naturally not concerned with the question of the continuity of pleasure, but there was an analogous question of equal consequence, whether the wise man could be happy under all circumstances. The importance of this revealed itself shortly after Plato's demise and showed no abatement for three centuries. In two passages Cicero lists the names of those who gave an affirmative answer – from which the name of Plato is conspicuously absent – and elsewhere he pretends to cite the opinion of Epicurus, misrepresenting him shamelessly and using his name as an excuse for parading a tedious collection of his own translations from Greek tragedy on the topic of pain.<sup>58</sup> What Epicurus is on record as saying is this: "Even if under torture the wise man is happy."<sup>59</sup> Cicero chose to imagine him in the brazen bull of the tyrant Phalaris, in which the victims were roasted alive, and as saying "How pleasant; how little this torture means to me!" This is a shabby invention and shameless quibbling. It ignores the difference between *suavis*, "pleasant" and *beatus*, "happy."

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