

Episode 222 - Revisiting the Relationship Between Happiness and Pleasure

Post by “Don” of April 8, 2024 at 8:39 AM

More notes:

Did Epicurus hold that Pain is properly thought of as the ultimate or Chief Evil, and how do we make sense of that statement?

I'm my opinion, Cicero is trying to use Epicurus's (correct!) contention that pleasure is the summum bonum to say evil is the summum malum.

What is the relation to pleasure and pain?

Here's the way Cicero put it:

XXXII. But to return to our theme (for we were speaking about pain when we drifted into the consideration of this letter) we may now thus sum up the whole matter: he who is subject to the greatest possible evil (summo malo) is not happy (beatus) so long as he remains subject to it, whereas the wise man always is happy (beatus), though he is at times subject to pain (dolore); pain therefore is not the greatest possible evil (summum malum dolor).

Using Google Translate: “He who is in the highest evil, while he is in it, is not happy. but the wise man is always happy and is sometimes in pain; therefore pain is not the greatest evil.” THIS is a much preferable way of looking at it.

Some may bring up Vatican Saying 42 which Saint-Andre translates as:

[42] At the very same time, the greatest good is created and the greatest evil is removed.

BUT on VS42, see [Versions of Vatican Saying 42](#)

THAT'S NOT WHAT'S in the manuscript!! There is NO τοῦ κακοῦ (“evil”) in the manuscript! That's an addition...

BUT the other “correction” by Bailey and others reads:

Ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀπολαύσεως.

"The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment" [Bailey]

SO... there is no consensus on the *correct* reading of VS 42. I wouldn't use that for support one way or the other because of the difficulties in the manuscript.

I think Cicero is trying to use the opposite of “summum bonum” which is just the Latin for telos or greatest good... THAT TO WHICH EVERYTHING ELSE POINTS - OUR ULTIMATE REASON FOR DOING ANYTHING... which, according to Epicurus (correctly in my opinion) is PLEASURE.

Cicero takes “summum malum” uses that to refer to PAIN. MAYBE pain COULD be called the “summum malum” but I don’t think that characterization works. Avoiding pain is that to which everything “points away from”?... BUT an Epicurean is STILL going to voluntarily take on some pain if a greater pleasure can ensue later.

In Epicurus’s philosophy, there is ultimately ONLY PAIN and PLEASURE.