

Episode 251 - Cicero's OTNOTG 26 - How Niagara Falls Helps Us Understand the Flux, the Heap, and the Epicurean Gods

Post by "Cassius" of October 26, 2024 at 9:16 AM

Just to add this as a note for future thought and discussion, what we talk about in this podcast plays into our recent discussion of the sorites / heap question and how that is related both to the waterfall / bathing in the same river questions. And both of those play into the issue of seeing pleasure as both the composite ultimate good while also consisting of individual feelings of pleasure.

When Epicurus asked how he should recognize the good if not for the pleasures of sex, food, etc, that is essentially the same question as "how should he recognize a waterfall or a river if not for the drops of water that compose it?"

The point would not be that we should consider any individual drops of water to make up the whole waterfall, or any individual pleasures to make up the whole of good, but that the parts and the whole are both real and inseparably connected.

Our natural faculties allow us to assemble the notion of a "waterfall" or a "river" from the perceptions of the individual drops of which the waterfall or river is composed. Likewise, our natural faculties (perceptions and minds) allow us to assemble "the good" from the individual pleasures of which the notion of "the good" is composed. There is no conflict between saying that both individual drops and waterfalls exist and are real to us. Likewise it is proper to say that both individual pleasures and the overall concept of the good as pleasure exist and are real to us.

And just like a waterfall or a river or a heap exists through the movement of the particles that compose it, at least one type of living being could be held to exist indefinitely, analogous to a river or waterfall, if it could find a way to constantly replenish the movement of the particles that compose *it*.

But for the ethics question, which concerns more people today than the god question does, the point would be that the abstract good of pleasure can be said to exist only because it is a composite of all the constantly moving and changing particular pleasures that compose it. Were we to try to separate out all the individual physical and mental pleasures that compose it (such as sex, food, drink, calmness, delight, tranquility, etc) we would have nothing left by which to recognize the good. The concept of Pleasure as the good does not exist as a Platonic ideal, it exists and is recognized only by our perception of "Pleasure" as a composite many particular pleasures, in the same way that we perceive "heaps" or "waterfalls" or "rivers" as composites of many grains of sand or drops of water.

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