

Discussion of Article: "On Pleasure, Pain and Happiness"

Post by "Cassius" of July 15, 2019 at 7:27 AM

And so that we can throw everything into the pot before we cook it --- in addition to the above on "limits," you have the closely related issue of "purity."

PD12. It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he doesn't know the nature of the universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

Here is another excerpt from [Philebus](#) that I think explains why purity is an issue. If you take the following sentence, and instead of "whiteness" you read "pleasure," you see some immediate implications for why Epicurus was concerned about the purity of pleasure, and why it is very important to discuss pleasure unmixed with any pain whatsoever. Take this sentence and try that:

*SOCRATES: * True, Protarchus; and so the purest white, and not the greatest or largest in quantity, is to be deemed truest and most beautiful?*

PROTARCHUS: Right.

To me you get almost a direct reflect of the first part of PD3 when you do that; "PD3. The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain."

Here is more context to give you the background:

SOCRATES: And now, having fairly separated the pure pleasures and those which may be rightly termed impure, let us further add to our description of them, that the pleasures which are in excess have no measure, but that those which are not in excess have measure; the great, the excessive, whether more or less frequent, we shall be right in referring to the class of the infinite, and of the more and less, which pours through body and soul alike; and the others we shall refer to the class which has measure.

PROTARCHUS: Quite right, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Still there is something more to be considered about pleasures.

PROTARCHUS: What is it?

*SOCRATES: When you speak of **purity** and clearness, or of excess, abundance, greatness and sufficiency, in what relation do these terms stand to truth?*

PROTARCHUS: *Why do you ask, Socrates?*

SOCRATES: *Because, Protarchus, I should wish to test pleasure and knowledge in every possible way, in order that if there be a **pure and impure element** in either of them, I may present the pure element for judgment, and then they will be more easily judged of by you and by me and by all of us.*

PROTARCHUS: *Most true.*

SOCRATES: *Let us investigate all the pure kinds; first selecting for consideration a single instance.*

PROTARCHUS: *What instance shall we select?*

SOCRATES: *Suppose that we first of all take whiteness.*

PROTARCHUS: *Very good.*

SOCRATES: ***How can there be purity in whiteness, and what purity? Is that purest which is greatest or most in quantity, or that which is most unadulterated and freest from any admixture of other colours?***

PROTARCHUS: *Clearly that which is most unadulterated.*

SOCRATES: *True, Protarchus; **and so the purest white, and not the greatest or largest in quantity, is to be deemed truest and most beautiful?***

PROTARCHUS: *Right.*

We can do the same substitution exercise with this example from Socrates: "How can there be purity in [pleasure/whiteness], and what purity? Is that purest which is greatest or most in quantity, or that which is most unadulterated and freest from any admixture of [pain/ other colours]?"

Answer: "clearly, that which is most unadulterated."

So the implication of the analogy is that the purest/highest pleasure is not that which is the greatest quantity, but that which is unadulterated with pain, just as the purest white is not the most quantity of white, but that which is not mixed with other colors.

Does that mean that because sleep, for example, is frequently something that gives us pleasure without any mixture of pain, we should consider sleep to be the highest pleasure and sleep as much as possible?

I don't think so. Once again, I think that Epicurus is dealing with "pure pleasure" in a way that shows how logical arguments that pleasure as a faculty cannot be the guide to the best life, not calling us to select only those simplest activities which produce only pleasure.