

Philebus - Plato's Arguments Against Pleasure and Epicurean Responses

Post by “Cassius” of October 1, 2019 at 9:53 PM

Godfrey, while this is on my mind, I recall also thinking that the parts of [Philebus](#) that I pulled out to the "limits" as relevant are pretty clear, but the version of the argument made by Seneca is even *more* clear. To me that's especially true with Seneca's formulation that "THE ABILITY TO INCREASE IS PROOF THAT A THING IS IMPERFECT." I think Plato says the same thing in different words, but Seneca's version is extremely precise. A thing which has no limits cannot be "perfect" and therefore it cannot be the "highest" anything, and since we're talking about the "highest" good - that rules out pleasure!

Once someone gets a handle on the argument that is being made, PD3 and the otherwise troublesome passages of the Letter to Menoeceus as to "limits" make perfect sense.

And the continuation of the argument into the discussion of "purity" is also extremely important, and bears on some otherwise very obscure parts of the [Principal Doctrines](#).

But this is going to take a long and dedicated campaign to bring this observation into wider view.

_Seneca's Letters - Book I - Letter XVI: This also is a saying of Epicurus: **“If you live according to nature, you will never be poor; if you live according to opinion, you will never be rich.”** Nature's wants are slight; the demands of opinion are boundless. Suppose that the property of many millionaires is heaped up in your possession. Assume that fortune carries you far beyond the limits of a private income, decks you with gold, clothes you in purple, and brings you to such a degree of luxury and wealth that you can bury the earth under your marble floors; that you may not only possess, but tread upon, riches. Add statues, paintings, and whatever any art has devised for the luxury; you will only learn from such things to crave still greater. ****Natural desires are limited; but those which spring from false opinion can have no stopping point. The false has no limits. ****

[Seneca's Letters - To Lucilius - 66.45](#): “What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.[5] What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not

also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect.”“THE ABILITY TO INCREASE IS PROOF THAT A THING IS IMPERFECT.”

Here Seneca explicitly links PD3 to the “limits” argument, but Seneca being the Stoic that he was, chose to focus on the “Tranquility” rather than viewing the result as the uninterrupted enjoyment of the pleasures that filled the cup in the first place:

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