

The Goal of Life - From Torquatus in "On Ends"

Post by "Cassius" of January 12, 2017 at 12:17 PM

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[Elli's post](#) on the response given by Richard Dawkins to the Cardinal on the goal of life takes me back to what I think is one of the most clear and explicit statements of the goal of life that is contained in any reliable ancient Epicurean text. It comes through Torquatus in Cicero's On Ends, but I see no reason to doubt that Cicero took it straight from an authoritative Epicurean source because it is so bold and so uncompromising.

Any doubts that the goal is defined by the word "pleasure" can be erased by checking the side-by-side Latin at the link below. Even this translator, clear as he is, wants to waffle in the last sentence, but check it out - the last passage is "it must therefore be admitted that the Chief Good is to live 'agreeably'" but the Latin is "fatendum est summum esse bonum iucunde vivere" with the key word being "iucunde." Check the link to the Latin translation - iucunde means "pleasantly - delightfully" (link to translation also included). Anyone who waffles on the core point that the goal of life is to live pleasantly is not only wasting their life while they waffle, they aren't speaking Epicurean philosophy:

Torquatus: "The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. What possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain. He will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement."

"Suppose on the other hand a person crushed beneath the heaviest load of mental and of bodily anguish to which humanity is liable. Grant him no prospect of ultimate relief in view; let him neither have nor hope to have a gleam of pleasure. Can one describe or imagine a more pitiable state? If then a life full of pain is the thing most to be avoided, it follows that to live in pain is the highest evil; and this position implies that a life of pleasure is the ultimate good. In fact, the mind possesses nothing in itself upon which it can rest as final. Every fear, every sorrow can be traced back to pain -- there is no other thing besides pain which is of its own nature capable of causing either anxiety or distress.

“Pleasure and pain moreover supply the motives of pleasure and of the principles of desire and of avoidance, and the springs of conduct generally. This being so, it clearly follows that actions are right and praiseworthy only as being a means to the attainment of a life of pleasure. But that which is not itself a means to anything else, but to which all else is a means, is what the Greeks term the Telos, the highest, ultimate or final Good. It must therefore be admitted that the Chief Good is to live agreeably.

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[Cicero, Marcus Tullius, On Ends - De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum](#)

[Cassius Amicus](#)

I also think this is where the Epicurean view of the gods and the concept of divinity meshes with the Epicurean view of the goal of life. "Gods" seem to be by definition beings who have achieved the ability, in reality and in actuality, to exist in this constant state of joy defined as - "the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain." Our goal set by nature (the goal of all living things) is to do whatever we can to duplicate that state of constant pleasurable living, within the limits and to the best of our respective capacities and circumstances.