

The "One and the Many" Question - Do You Fancy You Have Found Treasure of Wisdom In This? Do You Puzzle Your Friends And Even Your Dog About It? What In the World Is Socrates Talking About?

Post by "Cassius" of October 24, 2021 at 11:31 AM

I will link to this thread in the show notes for Episode Ninety-Four, because I think we are going to find that the issue is very relevant. But I want to set it out as a separate thread. The basic question in the thread is "

"What In The Heck Is Socrates Even Talking About?" Can we help each other by explaining what we think this is about?

The heart of the question I think becomes most clear in this brief excerpt, which comes from the full [Philebus](#):

Quote

SOCRATES: We say that the one and many become identified by thought, and that now, as in time past, they run about together, in and out of every word which is uttered, and that this union of them will never cease, and is not now beginning, but is, as I believe, an everlasting quality of thought itself, which never grows old. Any young man, when he first tastes these subtleties, is delighted, and fancies that he has found a treasure of wisdom; in the first enthusiasm of his joy he leaves no stone, or rather no thought unturned, now rolling up the many into the one, and kneading them together, now unfolding and dividing them; he puzzles himself first and above all, and then he proceeds to puzzle his neighbours, whether they are older or younger, or of his own age—that makes no difference; neither father nor mother does he spare; no human being who has ears is safe from him, hardly even his dog, and a barbarian would have no chance of escaping him, if an interpreter could only be found.

But in order to understand that you probably need to read this preliminary argument:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2237-the-one-and-the-many-question-do-you-fancy-you-have-found-treasure-of-wisdom-in/>

SOCRATES: The awe which I always feel, Protarchus, about the names of the gods is more than human—it exceeds all other fears. And now I would not sin against Aphrodite by naming her amiss; let her be called what she pleases. But Pleasure I know to be manifold, and with her, as I was just now saying, we must begin, and consider what her nature is. She has one name, and therefore you would imagine that she is one; and yet surely she takes the most varied and even unlike forms. For do we not say that the intemperate has pleasure, and that the temperate has pleasure in his very temperance,—that the fool is pleased when he is full of foolish fancies and hopes, and that the wise man has pleasure in his wisdom? and how foolish would any one be who affirmed that all these opposite pleasures are severally alike!

PROTARCHUS: Why, Socrates, they are opposed in so far as they spring from opposite sources, but they are not in themselves opposite. For must not pleasure be of all things most absolutely like pleasure,—that is, like itself?

SOCRATES: Yes, my good friend, just as colour is like colour;—in so far as colours are colours, there is no difference between them; and yet we all know that black is not only unlike, but even absolutely opposed to white: or again, as figure is like figure, for all figures are comprehended under one class; and yet particular figures may be absolutely opposed to one another, and there is an infinite diversity of them. And we might find similar examples in many other things; therefore do not rely upon this argument, which would go to prove the unity of the most extreme opposites. And I suspect that we shall find a similar opposition among pleasures.

PROTARCHUS: Very likely; but how will this invalidate the argument?

SOCRATES: Why, I shall reply, that dissimilar as they are, you apply to them a new predicate, for you say that all pleasant things are good; now although no one can argue that pleasure is not pleasure, he may argue, as we are doing, that pleasures are oftener bad than good; but you call them all good, and at the same time are compelled, if you are pressed, to acknowledge that they are unlike. And so you must tell us what is the identical quality existing alike in good and bad pleasures, which makes you designate all of them as good.

PROTARCHUS: What do you mean, Socrates? Do you think that any one who asserts pleasure to be the good, will tolerate the notion that some pleasures are good and others bad?

SOCRATES: And yet you will acknowledge that they are different from one another, and sometimes opposed?

PROTARCHUS: Not in so far as they are pleasures.

SOCRATES: That is a return to the old position, Protarchus, and so we are to say (are we?) that there is no difference in pleasures, but that they are all alike; and the examples which have just been cited do not pierce our dull minds, but we go on arguing all the same, like the weakest and most inexperienced reasoners? (Probably corrupt.)

PROTARCHUS: What do you mean?

SOCRATES: Why, I mean to say, that in self-defence I may, if I like, follow your example, and assert boldly that the two things most unlike are most absolutely alike; and the result will be that you and I will prove ourselves to be very tyros in the art of disputing; and the argument will be blown away and lost. Suppose that we put back, and return to the old position; then perhaps we may come to an understanding with one another.

PROTARCHUS: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: Shall I, Protarchus, have my own question asked of me by you?

PROTARCHUS: What question?

SOCRATES: Ask me whether wisdom and science and mind, and those other qualities which I, when asked by you at first what is the nature of the good, affirmed to be good, are not in the same case with the pleasures of which you spoke.

PROTARCHUS: What do you mean?

SOCRATES: The sciences are a numerous class, and will be found to present great differences. But even admitting that, like the pleasures, they are opposite as well as different, should I be worthy of the name of dialectician if, in order to avoid this difficulty, I were to say (as you are saying of pleasure) that there is no difference between one science and another;—would not the argument founder and disappear like an idle tale, although we might ourselves escape drowning by clinging to a fallacy?

PROTARCHUS: May none of this befall us, except the deliverance! Yet I like the even-handed justice which is applied to both our arguments. Let us assume, then, that there are many and diverse pleasures, and many and different sciences.

SOCRATES: And let us have no concealment, Protarchus, of the differences between my good and yours; but let us bring them to the light in the hope that, in the process of testing them, they may show whether pleasure is to be called the good, or wisdom, or some third quality; for surely we are not now simply contending in order that my view or that yours may prevail, but I presume that we ought both of us to be fighting for the truth.

PROTARCHUS: Certainly we ought.

SOCRATES: Then let us have a more definite understanding and establish the principle on which the argument rests.

PROTARCHUS: What principle?

SOCRATES: A principle about which all men are always in a difficulty, and some men sometimes against their will.

PROTARCHUS: Speak plainer.

SOCRATES: The principle which has just turned up, which is a marvel of nature; for that one should be many or many one, are wonderful propositions; and he who affirms either is very open to attack.

PROTARCHUS: Do you mean, when a person says that I, Protarchus, am by nature one and also many, dividing the single 'me' into many 'me's,' and even opposing them as great and small, light and heavy, and in ten thousand other ways?

SOCRATES: Those, Protarchus, are the common and acknowledged paradoxes about the one and many, which I may say that everybody has by this time agreed to dismiss as childish and obvious and detrimental to the true course of thought; and no more favour is shown to that other puzzle, in which a person proves the members and parts of anything to be divided, and then confessing that they are all one, says laughingly in disproof of his own words: Why, here is a miracle, the one is many and infinite, and the many are only one.

PROTARCHUS: But what, Socrates, are those other marvels connected with this subject which, as you imply, have not yet become common and acknowledged?

SOCRATES: When, my boy, the one does not belong to the class of things that are born and perish, as in the instances which we were giving, for in those cases, and when unity is of this concrete nature, there is, as I was saying, a universal consent that no refutation is needed; but when the assertion is made that man is one, or ox is one, or beauty one, or the good one, then the interest which attaches to these and similar unities and the attempt which is made to divide them gives birth to a controversy.

PROTARCHUS: Of what nature?

SOCRATES: In the first place, as to whether these unities have a real existence; and then how each individual unity, being always the same, and incapable either of generation or of destruction, but retaining a permanent individuality, can be conceived either as dispersed and multiplied in the infinity of the world of generation, or as still entire and yet divided from itself, which latter would seem to be the greatest impossibility of all, for how can one and the same thing be at the same time in one and in many things? These, Protarchus, are the real difficulties, and this is the one and many to which they relate; they are the source of great perplexity if ill decided, and the right determination of them is very helpful.

PROTARCHUS: Then, Socrates, let us begin by clearing up these questions.

SOCRATES: That is what I should wish.

PROTARCHUS: And I am sure that all my other friends will be glad to hear them discussed; [Philebus](#), fortunately for us, is not disposed to move, and we had better not stir him up with questions.

SOCRATES: Good; and where shall we begin this great and multifarious battle, in which such various points are at issue? Shall we begin thus?

PROTARCHUS: How?

SOCRATES: We say that the one and many become identified by thought, and that now, as in time past, they run about together, in and out of every word which is uttered, and that this union of them will never cease, and is not now beginning, but is, as I believe, an everlasting quality of thought itself, which never grows old. Any young man, when he first tastes these subtleties, is delighted, and fancies that he has found a treasure of wisdom; in the first enthusiasm of his joy he leaves no stone, or rather no thought unturned, now rolling up the many into the one, and kneading them together, now unfolding and dividing them; he puzzles himself first and above all, and then he proceeds to puzzle his neighbours, whether they are older or younger, or of his own age—that makes no difference; neither father nor mother does he spare; no human being who has ears is safe from him, hardly even his dog, and a barbarian would have no chance of escaping him, if an interpreter could only be found.

PROTARCHUS: Considering, Socrates, how many we are, and that all of us are young men, is there not a danger that we and [Philebus](#) may all set upon you, if you abuse us? We understand what you mean; but is there no charm by which we may dispel all this confusion, no more excellent way of arriving at the truth? If there is, we hope that you will guide us into that way, and we will do our best to follow, for the enquiry in which we are engaged, Socrates, is not unimportant.

SOCRATES: The reverse of unimportant, my boys, as [Philebus](#) calls you, and there neither is nor ever will be a better than my own favourite way, which has nevertheless already often deserted me and left me helpless in the hour of need.

PROTARCHUS: Tell us what that is.

SOCRATES: One which may be easily pointed out, but is by no means easy of application; it is the parent of all the discoveries in the arts.

PROTARCHUS: Tell us what it is.

SOCRATES: A gift of heaven, which, as I conceive, the gods tossed among men by the hands of a new Prometheus, and therewith a blaze of light; and the ancients, who were our betters and nearer the gods than we are, handed down the tradition, that whatever things are said to be are composed of one and many, and have the finite and infinite implanted in them: seeing, then, that such is the order of the world, we too ought in every enquiry to begin by laying down one idea of that which is the subject of enquiry; this unity we shall find in everything. Having found it, we may next proceed to look for two, if there be two, or, if not, then for three or some other number, subdividing each of these units, until at last the unity with which we began is seen not only to be one and many and infinite, but also a definite number; the infinite must not

be suffered to approach the many until the entire number of the species intermediate between unity and infinity has been discovered,—then, and not till then, we may rest from division, and without further troubling ourselves about the endless individuals may allow them to drop into infinity. This, as I was saying, is the way of considering and learning and teaching one another, which the gods have handed down to us. But the wise men of our time are either too quick or too slow in conceiving plurality in unity. Having no method, they make their one and many anyhow, and from unity pass at once to infinity; the intermediate steps never occur to them. And this, I repeat, is what makes the difference between the mere art of disputation and true dialectic.

PROTARCHUS: I think that I partly understand you Socrates, but I should like to have a clearer notion of what you are saying.

SOCRATES: I may illustrate my meaning by the letters of the alphabet, Protarchus, which you were made to learn as a child.

PROTARCHUS: How do they afford an illustration?

SOCRATES: The sound which passes through the lips whether of an individual or of all men is one and yet infinite.

PROTARCHUS: Very true.

SOCRATES: And yet not by knowing either that sound is one or that sound is infinite are we perfect in the art of speech, but the knowledge of the number and nature of sounds is what makes a man a grammarian.

PROTARCHUS: Very true.

SOCRATES: And the knowledge which makes a man a musician is of the same kind.

PROTARCHUS: How so?

SOCRATES: Sound is one in music as well as in grammar?

PROTARCHUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And there is a higher note and a lower note, and a note of equal pitch:—may we affirm so much?

PROTARCHUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But you would not be a real musician if this was all that you knew; though if you did not know this you would know almost nothing of music.

PROTARCHUS: Nothing.

SOCRATES: But when you have learned what sounds are high and what low, and the number and nature of the intervals and their limits or proportions, and the systems compounded out of them, which our fathers discovered, and have handed down to us who are their descendants under the name of harmonies; and the affections corresponding to them in the movements of the human body, which when measured by numbers ought, as they say, to be called rhythms and measures; and they tell us that the same principle should be applied to every one and many;—when, I say, you have learned all this, then, my dear friend, you are perfect; and you may be said to understand any other subject, when you have a similar grasp of it. But the infinity of kinds and the infinity of individuals which there is in each of them, when not classified, creates in every one of us a state of infinite ignorance; and he who never looks for number in anything, will not himself be looked for in the number of famous men.

Post by “Don” of October 24, 2021 at 12:27 PM

That's a lot of text! I didn't read all the gadfly's arguments, but here's my take.

Socrates is doing a semantic slight of hand. He's using (the feeling of) pleasure and (something that gives) pleasure synonymously.

My position is that Epicurus used the FEELING of pleasure as the standard, highest good, etc., irregardless of its source. This gets at the personal, inward pathē nature of pleasure Epicurus was talking about.

Socrates uses pleasure in the sense of "a pleasure" as in "a source of pleasure."

There are many sources of pleasure, but someone can tell if they're feeling pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 12:29 PM

What about the more general question of the "one and the many" issue? What is the general point he is making, not just about pleasure, but about anything, as to separating things into "one and many" categories?

Post by “Don” of October 24, 2021 at 12:59 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2237-the-one-and-the-many-question-do-you-fancy-you-have-found-treasure-of-wisdom-in/>

Personally, I think Socrates is making a mountain out of a molehill. As humans, we categorize things all the time, focusing on some characteristics and excluding others. Libraries do this with books. A book about ice skating in Greenland: is it a book about ice skating? Is it a book about Greenland? Pick one. Move along. Just like "the one" of sports. Is football a sport? Is badminton a sport? Is chess a sport? Are there many sports or one sport? We categorize things. Get over it. It's not a big deal.

I think also though that this is a different problem than the one he makes for pleasure. There I think he's intentionally confusing two things: the feeling itself and the sources of that feeling.

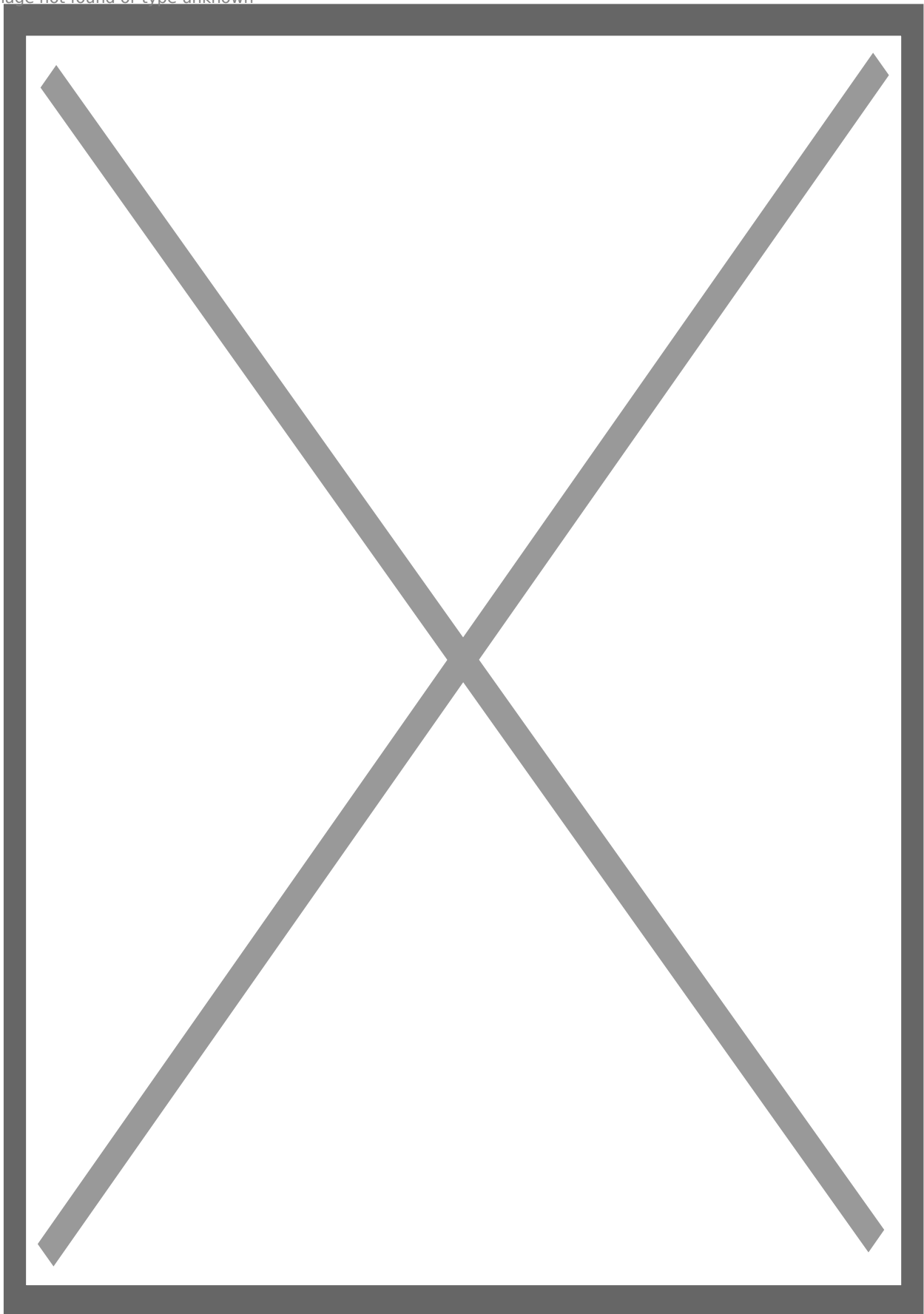
Post by "Cassius" of October 24, 2021 at 1:07 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

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Yes, this is a much deeper issue, and probably more closely involves the questions revolving around the canon of truth, which probably does precede our evaluation of pleasure.

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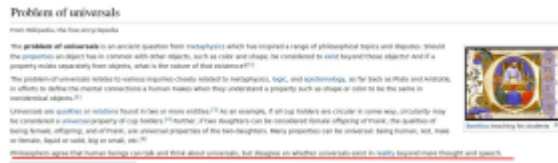


<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2237-the-one-and-the-many-question-do-you-fancy-you-have-found-treasure-of-wisdom-in/>

[Problem of universals - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

I believe we are eventually going to have to wrestle with the line underlined in red:



I could tell you what my (half-formed) viewpoint is but that would spoil the fun 😊

Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 1:09 PM

We are essentially going to have to fill out what is unstated at that Wikipedia page: What was Epicurus' position?

Plato [\[edit \]](#)

Plato believed that there was a sharp distinction between the world of perceivable objects and the world of universals or *forms*: one can only have mere opinions about the former, but one can have *knowledge* about the latter. For Plato it was not possible to have knowledge of anything that could change or was particular, since knowledge had to be forever unchanging and general.^[8] For that reason, the world of the forms is the real world, like *sunlight*, while the sensible world is only imperfectly or partially real, like *shadows*. This *Platonic realism*, however, in denying that the *eternal Forms* are mental artifacts, differs sharply with modern forms of idealism.

One of the first nominalist critiques of Plato's realism was that of *Diogenes of Sinope*, who said "I've seen Plato's cups and table, but not his cupness and tableness."^[9]

Aristotle [\[edit \]](#)

Main article: Aristotle's theory of universals

Plato's student Aristotle disagreed with his tutor. Aristotle transformed Plato's forms into "*formal causes*", the blueprints or *essences* of individual things. Whereas Plato idealized *geometry*, Aristotle emphasized *nature* and related disciplines and therefore much of his thinking concerns living beings and their properties. The nature of universals in Aristotle's philosophy therefore hinges on his view of *natural kinds*. Instead of categorizing *being* according to the structure of thought, he proposed that the categorical analysis be directed upon the structure of the natural world.^[10] He used the principle of *predication* in *Categories*, where he established that universal terms are involved in a relation of predication if some facts expressed by ordinary sentences hold.^[11]

In his work *On Interpretation*, he maintained that the concept of "universal" is apt to be predicated of many and that singular is not.^[12] For instance, *man* is a universal while *Callias* is a singular. The philosopher distinguished highest genera like animal and species like man but he maintained that both are predicated of individual men.^[13] This was considered part of an approach to the principle of things, which adheres to the criterion that what is most universal is also most real.^[13] Consider for example a particular *oak* tree. This is a member of a species and it has much in common with other oak trees, past, present and future. Its universal, its oakness, is a part of it. A biologist can study oak trees and learn about oakness and more generally the intelligible order within the sensible world. Accordingly, Aristotle was more confident than Plato about coming to know the sensible world; he was a prototypical *empiricist* and a founder of *induction*. Aristotle was a new, *moderate* sort of realist about universals.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2237-the-one-and-the-many-question-do-you-fancy-you-have-found-treasure-of-wisdom-in/>

While I definitely don't think Epicurus agreed with Plato on this, I don't think he agreed with Aristotle either, and I think we're going to rotate back to that section on the origins of Epicurean empiricism from DeLacy:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/index.php?attachment/2283-pasted-from-clipboard-png/>

Post by “Don” of October 24, 2021 at 1:36 PM

This discussion about "one and many" (and universals) implies some kind of "essence" linking all the members of a class together. That was rejected outright by Epicurus if I remember correctly.

I think we fall into the trap of fighting in the enemies' arena if we go too far down this way. They've created ingenuous trap doors and hidden hazards on their playing field. I don't know how profitable it is to argue with them if we can't even agree on ground rules. I think that's one of the major problems with the later Epicureans brought up in De finibus.

Post by “Don” of October 24, 2021 at 1:42 PM

An Epicurean dialogue may go:

Epicurus: Does this action you desire bring pleasure now?

Pythocles: Yes.

E: Then it is good. However, let me ask, Does this same action bring pain in the future?

P: Possibly.

E: Ah! Does the pleasure you would feel now outweigh the pain you will feel later?

P: The pain, I imagine, would be long-lived for my life

E: Then choose wisely with that in mind. Even though your action brings pleasure now, consider the goal is leading the most pleasurable life.

And this is all off the cuff. I reserve the right to extend and amend my remarks 😊

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2237-the-one-and-the-many-question-do-you-fancy-you-have-found-treasure-of-wisdom-in/>

Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 1:43 PM

I would like to be wrong on this, but it is my impression that most beginner philosophy student is run through this mill and forced to take a position on it one way or the other, or else be left to nihilism.

I think in the end it's like with propositional logic - we have to train people to be alert to the issues, and to the limitations of the standard approach, and they never really can come to grip with what is being discussed if we don't do that.

Not everyone will want to fight that battle, but it is probably where the Epicureans were ultimately defeated - when they stopped fighting it and gave in on the issue to the group that Torquatus says he agreed with.

Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 1:46 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

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Yes of course I agree that to be the practical conclusion.

Again unfortunately, we are faced with the problem that the overbearing established viewpoint starts before that point, and wants to question whether pleasure is in fact, or can in fact, be

considered to be "the" legitimate goal or even "a" legitimate goal.

Plato and Aristotle and the rest cut their knees off at the earlier stage because through their logical arguments they convince people that they should not even consider pleasure to be "A" good, much less "the" good.

Post by “Don” of October 24, 2021 at 1:49 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Post by “Don” of October 24, 2021 at 1:54 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

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Well, then, maybe the position is simply to assert "Forget Plato and Aristotle." They've constructed a Potemkin village of illusion and made you live it. Abandon all brainwashing and set sail in your own little boat

Post by "Cassius" of October 24, 2021 at 2:23 PM

That's a "ha ha I wish we could" rather than a "ha ha you're funny" 😊

Post by "Don" of October 24, 2021 at 2:36 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's a "ha ha I wish we could" rather than a "ha ha you're funny" 😊

Well, what's stopping us? 😊

Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 2:54 PM

For a first answer, the same considerations are "stopping us" as led to the writing by the Founders of:

Against the Physicians

Against Timocrates

Against the Dialecticians

In Criticism of Democritus

Against Empedocles

Against Plato

Against Aristotle

Summary of Objections to the Physicists

Against the Megarians

Post by “Don” of October 24, 2021 at 3:02 PM

Right. They put out position papers stating their objections. You make a statement, plant your flag, and move on.

Although, I suppose we need to have refutations ready at hand... So, I suppose I can see where you're coming from.

It would be soooo nice to have just ONE of those 😞

Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 3:57 PM

Of course I'm strongly in favor of division of labor.

Not everyone need focus on the war part.

However I strongly suspect that a lot of the reason that the war seems less important at times is that we do not realize the depth to which all of us have been corrupted without our suspecting it.

If we were truly free of the corruption I suspect that we would be outraged at the pain it has already and continues to cost us - both us and our friends.

Post by “Cassius” of October 24, 2021 at 4:00 PM

As with the episode we recorded today - these are really deep issues but actually fun to dig into - in that sense Socrates was probably right about how we get excited enough to talk to our dogs about it!

But that's an example of where Epicurus was right too - philosophy is enjoyable in the pursuit of it, and that's another example of how we don't need glory and power and riches.

Post by “Don” of October 24, 2021 at 6:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But that's an example of where Epicurus was right too - philosophy is enjoyable in the pursuit of it, and that's another example of how we don't need glory and power and riches.

I would also add:

A philosopher's words are empty if they do not heal the suffering of mankind. For just as medicine is useless if it does not remove sickness from the body, so philosophy is useless if it does not remove suffering from the soul.