

# Is There Anything in Epicurean Physics or Epistemology That Would Prevent Epicurus From Generally Endorsing Aristippus / The Cyreniacs?

Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2023 at 2:21 PM

For some reason it occurs to me today that it might lead to some useful observations to consider whether any disagreements among Epicurus and Aristippus arise from physics or epistemology, or from something else. I consider starting at physics and epistemology, on which Epicurus is pretty clear, to be the gold standard for resolving questions about Epicurus's likely meaning when there is any doubt, so I went looking today back at Diogenes Laertius on Aristippus which is here:

[Lives of the Eminent Philosophers/Book II - Wikisource, the free online library](#)

Aside from an incredibly interesting collection of quips, the section is largely devoid of anything approaching epistemology or physics. In fact I don't see anything there at all on first glance. Maybe there are other sources that would clarify whether Aristippus believed in gods or life after death.

But passages like this seem to me to be disagreements as to the prudent way to pursue pleasure, not anything that would derive from physics or epistemology:

## Quote

**88.** Particular pleasure is desirable for its own sake, whereas happiness is desirable not for its own sake but for the sake of particular pleasures. That pleasure is the end is proved by the fact that from our youth up we are instinctively attracted to it, and, when we obtain it, seek for nothing more, and shun nothing so much as its opposite, pain. Pleasure is good even if it proceed from the most unseemly conduct, as Hippobotus says in his work *On the Sects*. For even if the action be irregular, still, at any rate, the resultant pleasure is desirable for its own sake and is good. **89.** The removal of pain, however, which is put forward in Epicurus, seems to them not to be pleasure at all, any more than the absence of pleasure is pain. For both pleasure and pain they hold to consist in motion, whereas absence of pleasure like absence of pain is not motion, since painlessness is the condition of one who is, as it were, asleep. They assert that some people may fail to choose pleasure because their minds are perverted; not all mental pleasures and pains, however, are derived from bodily counterparts. For instance, we take disinterested delight in the prosperity of our country which is as real as our delight in our own prosperity. Nor again do they admit that pleasure is derived

from the memory or expectation of good, which was a doctrine of Epicurus. **90.** For they assert that the movement affecting the mind is exhausted in course of time. Again they hold that pleasure is not derived from sight or from hearing alone. At all events, we listen with pleasure to imitation of mourning, while the reality causes pain. They gave the names of absence of pleasure and absence of pain to the intermediate conditions. However, they insist that bodily pleasures are far better than mental pleasures, and bodily pains far worse than mental pains, and that this is the reason why offenders are punished with the former. For they assumed pain to be more repellent, pleasure more congenial. For these reasons they paid more attention to the body than to the mind. Hence, although pleasure is in itself desirable, yet they hold that the things which are productive of certain pleasures are often of a painful nature, the very opposite of pleasure; so that to accumulate the pleasures which are productive of happiness appears to them a most irksome business.

So the question I am asking would be something like: If there is nothing in Epicurean physics or epistemology that would lead to the conclusion that Aristippus was wrong in general about the pleasure being the ultimate good, then might Epicurus not say to Epicurus "It's up to you in your personal preference to decide which pleasures to value most"?

In other words is the difference between Aristippus and Epicurus on the relative value of bodily vs mental pleasure and short-term vs long-term pleasure merely a difference of personal preference?

If it is an physics or epistemological difference, where is the difference found?

Thinking about this would help I think focus on how much of Epicurus' advice on how to pursue pleasure is generalized "rule of thumb" advice and personal preference, and how much is something deeper that the physics or epistemology would establish on a wider scale.

And in turn that would help us in understanding to what extent minimalism and asceticism is (as some allege) truly an inseparable part of the philosophy as opposed to contextual depending on the person and circumstances.