

Episode 196 - The Epicurean Arguments In Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 06

Post by "Cassius" of October 15, 2023 at 11:56 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I also think we need to acknowledge that there is a difference between pain and suffering

At the moment I would emphasize in order of importance:

(1) There are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, which means the presence of one is the absence of the other. Each and every feeling in life which is agreeable falls under pleasure, each and every feeling that is disagreeable falls under pain.

(2) Within "pleasure" and "pain" there are many different particular feelings which vary greatly from one another in terms of how we experience them. The pleasure of ice cream varies from the pleasure of listening to music. The pleasure of Beethoven differs from the pleasure of Wagner. This point two does not contradict point one, it's just a different perspective level.

(3) From a "whole person" perspective, the limit of the quantity of pleasure is the absence of pain. There is no way to improve the quantity of pleasure past 100%, and this understanding gives us the understanding that pleasure has a limit, and therefore it can't be made "better" by living forever. Living longer gives us more time experiencing pleasure, but no matter how long we live life never gets better than 100% pleasure.

Once propositions one and two are accepted then it's fair game to parse individual pleasures and pains any way one prefers to think about them and label them with whatever words seem useful in any language we'd like to use. But until it is accepted that pleasure includes both stimulating and non-stimulating pleasures, it's not possible to stand up against the argument of Cicero and others that Epicurus is using the term "pleasure" in a non-standard way.

Cicero's complaint is correct - Epicurus *is* using the word "pleasure" in a non-standard way, just like he uses "god" in a non-standard way. It seems clear that Epicurean terminology on pleasure differs from normal usage, and that "pleasure" includes two types of pleasures *which we can understand in words that mean something to us* (1 - exciting / stimulating pleasures vs 2 - pleasures of normal living in which we are not stimulated / excited).

The equation of "pleasure = absence of pain" is never going to make sense to a person who insists on sticking to standard terminology. Whatever explanations get us over that hurdle is desirable, and I am sure there are many ways to do it.