

Episode 270 - Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time

Post by “Cassius” of February 23, 2025 at 7:00 AM

Emily Austin on this point, from her Chapter 14:

Epicurus considers the fear of death one of the greatest impediments to the tranquil life. Deep and persistent fear puts tranquility out of reach. Just to be clear, though, Epicurus is like most people—he really enjoys living, and he’s therefore in no rush to die. Some contemporaries and predecessors of Epicurus did run around telling people that life is bleak, and that death is a welcome reprieve from human suffering, but Epicurus thinks that’s nonsense. The Cyrenaics were a competing hedonistic philosophical school and numbered among them was a man dubbed “Hegesias the Death Persuader” for the power of his argument that life is more painful than pleasant.² Hegesias was reportedly run out of town for his effects on the young. That life is unpleasant is an odd view for a hedonist, and Epicurus felt at pains to deny it.

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Here again, the importance of limits for psychological well-being plays a role in Epicurus’ claim that happiness does not require more time. He writes that “unlimited time and limited time contain equal amounts of pleasure, if one measures by the limits of reason.”¹⁶ On the surface, this appears false. If our pleasures are additive, then when I combine yesterday’s pleasures with today’s pleasures, I have more pleasures because I have lived longer. That means that the me of today has experienced more pleasure than the me of yesterday. If life were unlimited, then pleasure would be as well.

Epicurus claims, though, that our reason tells us that tranquility is a stable and complete state, not an additive state. Enough is enough at every moment we have it. We do not have more tranquility or more happiness by having it longer. In that sense, we do not have more “enough” tomorrow. We have enough all the time we live. He develops this thought at greater length in *Principal Doctrine 20*.