

Episode 174 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 26

- Chapter 12 - The New Hedonism 03

Post by "Cassius" of May 13, 2023 at 5:54 PM

Welcome to Episode 174 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

We are now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy."

This week we continue our discussion of Chapter 12, entitled "The New Hedonism."

- The True Nature of Pleasure
 - Pleasure, he declares, is cognate and connate with us, and by this he means not only that the inter-connection between life and pleasure manifests itself simultaneously with birth and by actions that precede the capacity to choose and understand; he means also that pleasure is of one nature with normal life, an ingredient or component of it. and not an appendage that may be attached and detached; it is a normal accompaniment of life in the same sense that pain and disease are abnormal.
- The Dualistic Good
- The Natural Ceilings Of Pleasure
- Pleasure Not Increased By Immortality
- The Fullness of Pleasure
- The Unity of Pleasure
- The Root of All Good
- Pleasure Can Be Continuous
- Continuous Pain Impossible
- The Relation of Pleasure To Virtue

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/53928284>

Post by "Cassius" of May 14, 2023 at 7:46 AM

The section we discuss today has some material I have not reviewed closely, including this as a footnote reference to a writer named Koerte from a work I have not seen:

Koerte: A. Koerte. Metrodori Epicurei Fragmenta, Leipzig, 1890

That's a reference for this from Epicurus:

"Each individual is physically constituted from the very beginning of his being for a definite span of life, so that, while he cannot live a longer term, he may live a shorter."

Post by "Cassius" of May 14, 2023 at 8:16 AM

On page 227 DeWitt writes:

To the youthful Menoeceus Epicurus writes: "Plain-tasting foods bring a pleasure equal to that of luxurious diet when once the pain arising from need has been removed. and bread and water afford the very keenest pleasure when one in need of them brings them to his lips:' 22

This is the fixed ceiling for pleasure. which he endeavors to establish in opposition to Plato. who compared the appetitive part of the soul to "a many-headed beast" and held to the opinion that desires increase endlessly and that pleasure defied the fixing of a limit. 23

The footnotes under 23 are from Plato's Republic:

[Plato, Republic, Book 9, section 585e](#)

[585d] that the kinds concerned with the service of the body partake less of truth and reality than those that serve the soul?" "Much less." "And do you not think that the same holds of the body itself in comparison with the soul?" "I do." "Then is not that which is fulfilled of what more truly is, and which itself more truly is, more truly filled and satisfied than that which being itself less real is filled with more unreal things?" "Of course." "If, then, to be filled with what befits nature is pleasure, then that which is more really filled with real things [585e] would more really and truly cause us to enjoy a true pleasure, while that which partakes of the less truly existent would be less truly and surely filled and would partake of a less trustworthy and less

true pleasure.” “Most inevitably,” he said. “Then those who have no experience [586a] of wisdom and virtue but are ever devoted to¹ feasting and that sort of thing are swept downward, it seems, and back again to the center, and so sway and roam² to and fro throughout their lives, but they have never transcended all this and turned their eyes to the true upper region nor been wafted there, nor ever been really filled with real things, nor ever tasted stable and pure pleasure, but with eyes ever bent upon the earth⁴ and heads bowed down over their tables they feast like cattle, [586b] grazing and copulating, ever greedy for more of these delights; and in their greed¹ kicking and butting one another with horns and hooves of iron they slay one another in senseless avidity, because they are vainly striving to satisfy with things that are not real the unreal and incontinent part of their souls.” “You describe in quite oracular style,³ Socrates,” said Glaucon, “the life of the multitude.” “And are not the pleasures with which they dwell inevitably commingled with pains, phantoms of true pleasure, illusions of scene-painting, so colored by contrary juxtaposition [586c] as to seem intense in either kind, and to beget mad loves of themselves in senseless souls, and to be fought for,¹ as Stesichorus says the wraith of Helen was fought for at Troy through ignorance of the truth?” “It is quite inevitable,” he said, “that it should be so.”

AND

[Plato, Republic, Book 8, section 562a](#)

[562a] “Shall we definitely assert, then, that such a man is to be ranged with democracy and would properly be designated as democratic?” “Let that be his place,” he said. “And now,” said I, “the fairest¹ polity and the fairest man remain for us to describe, the tyranny and the tyrant.” “Certainly,” he said. “Come then, tell me, dear friend, how tyranny arises.² That it is an outgrowth of democracy is fairly plain.” “Yes, plain.” “Is it, then, in a sense, in the same way in which democracy arises out of oligarchy that tyranny arises from democracy?” [562b] “How is that?” “The good that they proposed to themselves¹ and that was the cause of the establishment of oligarchy—it was wealth,² was it not?” “Yes.” “Well, then, the insatiate lust for wealth and the neglect of everything else for the sake of money-making was the cause of its undoing.” “True,” he said. “And is not the avidity of democracy for that which is its definition and criterion of good the thing which dissolves it³ too?” “What do you say its criterion to be?” “Liberty,⁴” I replied; “for you may hear it said that this is best managed in a democratic city, [562c] and for this reason that is the only city in which a man of free spirit will care to live.¹” “Why, yes,” he replied, “you hear that saying everywhere.” “Then, as I was about to observe,² is it not the excess and greed of this and the neglect of all other things that revolutionizes this constitution too and prepares the way for the necessity of a dictatorship?”

Post by “Cassius” of May 14, 2023 at 8:21 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3055-episode-174-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-26-chapter-12-the-new-hedonism-03/>

As to the issue of Plato arguing that pleasure has more limit, here is the argument in [Philebus](#) which seems to me even more clear than what Dewitt cited --- followed by the same argument in Seneca:

[Philebus](#) 27e, [link to full copy of Philebus \(Wikisource\)](#) (Gutenberg) 😞

*SOCRATES: I omit ten thousand other things, such as beauty and health and strength, and the many beauties and high perfections of the soul: O my beautiful [Philebus](#), the goddess, methinks, seeing the universal wantonness and wickedness of all things, and that there was in them no **limit to pleasures** and self-indulgence, devised the limit of law and order, whereby, as you say, [Philebus](#), she torments, or as I maintain, delivers the soul. — What think you, Protarchus? ...*

*SOCRATES: **Have pleasure and pain a limit, or do they belong to the class which admits of more and less?***

[PHILEBUS](#): They belong to the class which admits of more, Socrates; for pleasure would not be perfectly good if she were not infinite in quantity and degree.

SOCRATES: Nor would pain, [Philebus](#), be perfectly evil. And therefore the infinite cannot be that element which imparts to pleasure some degree of good. But now — admitting, if you like, that pleasure is of the nature of the infinite — in which of the aforesaid classes, O Protarchus and [Philebus](#), can we without irreverence place wisdom and knowledge and mind? And let us be careful, for I think that the danger will be very serious if we err on this point.

[PHILEBUS](#): You magnify, Socrates, the importance of your favourite god.

SOCRATES: And you, my friend, are also magnifying your favourite goddess; but still I must beg you to answer the question. ...

SOCRATES: And whence comes that soul, my dear Protarchus, unless the body of the universe, which contains elements like those in our bodies but in every way fairer, had also a soul? Can there be another source?

PROTARCHUS: Clearly, Socrates, that is the only source.

SOCRATES: Why, yes, Protarchus; for surely we cannot imagine that of the four classes, the finite, the infinite, the composition of the two, and the cause, the fourth, which enters into all things, giving to our bodies souls, and the art of self-management, and of healing disease, and operating in other ways to heal and organize, having too all the attributes of wisdom; — we cannot, I say, imagine that whereas the self-same elements exist, both in the entire heaven and in great provinces of the heaven, only fairer and purer, this last should not also in that higher sphere have designed the noblest and fairest things?

PROTARCHUS: *Such a supposition is quite unreasonable.*

SOCRATES: *Then if this be denied, should we not be wise in adopting the other view and maintaining that there is in the universe a mighty infinite and **an adequate limit**, of which we have often spoken, as well as a presiding cause of no mean power, which orders and arranges years and seasons and months, and may be justly called wisdom and mind?*

PROTARCHUS: *Most justly.*

We can find the same point made by Seneca in the following:

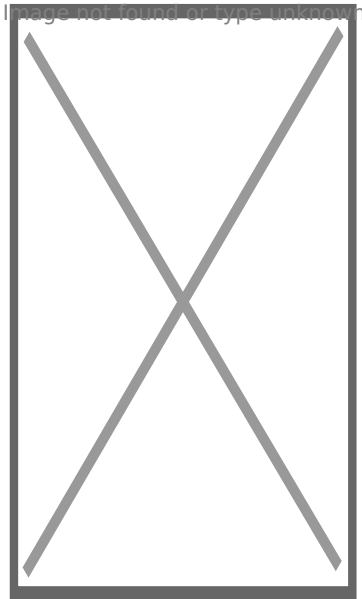
[Seneca's Letters - Book I - Letter XVI](#): This also is a saying of Epicurus: **"If you live according to nature, you will never be poor; if you live according to opinion, you will never be rich."** Nature's wants are slight; the demands of opinion are boundless. Suppose that the property of many millionaires is heaped up in your possession. Assume that fortune carries you far beyond the limits of a private income, decks you with gold, clothes you in purple, and brings you to such a degree of luxury and wealth that you can bury the earth under your marble floors; that you may not only possess, but tread upon, riches. Add statues, paintings, and whatever any art has devised for the luxury; you will only learn from such things to crave still greater. Natural desires are limited; but those which spring from false opinion can have no stopping point. The false has no limits.

[Seneca's Letters - To Lucilius - 66.45](#): "What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.[5] What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect."

Post by "Don" of May 14, 2023 at 8:33 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Koerte: A. Koerte. Metrodori Epicurei Fragmenta, Leipzig, 1890



[Metrodori Epicurei Fragmenta collegit scriptoris incerti Epicurei Commentarium moralem, subiecit Alfredus Koerte : Metrodorus, of Lampsacus, d. 277 B.C : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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Post by “Cassius” of May 19, 2023 at 6:50 AM

Episode 174 of the podcast is now available!

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Post by “Don” of May 19, 2023 at 7:57 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

SOCRATES: I omit ten thousand other things, such as beauty and health and strength, and the many beauties and high perfections of the soul: O my beautiful [Philebus](#), the goddess, methinks, seeing the universal wantonness and wickedness of all things, and

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that there was in them no limit to pleasures and self-indulgence, devised the limit of law and order, whereby, as you say, [Philebus](#), she torments, or as I maintain, delivers the soul. — What think you, Protarchus? ...

I admit I need to read [Philebus](#) in full, but, just riffing on the above excerpts + Seneca, it seems to me that Plato (via "Socrates") is conflating (on purpose) pleasure and desire. The *desire* for pleasure is infinite; and the things (mental and physical) from which we can derive pleasure are probably innumerable. But pleasure, as a feeling, is limited to the point where there is no pain, when the body is satiated. Full satisfaction is the limit of pleasure. I think Epicurus had that absolutely correct. The other philosophers took for granted (from *their* perspective!) that pleasure was bad, base, inferior and then designed their philosophy around that "a priori knowledge." Epicurus started from the ground up to investigate where pleasure came from, and decided it was nature's natural "stop and go" signals, then began to philosophize how we interact with pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of May 19, 2023 at 9:11 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

But pleasure, as a feeling, is limited to the point where there is no pain, when the body is satiated. Full satisfaction is the limit of pleasure.

Yep and that observation neatly meets the objection that pleasure has no limit or no end, and that for practical purposes (the limited life of humans) the human goal of pleasurable living CAN'T infinitely be made better. At some point every day and in your life you're full -- or as Joshua added in the podcast, you meet your final limit - death.

But it's also important that our calling this out amounts to engaging in "argument through logic" which to me is entirely separate from the argument from practical observation of nature. This is an argument that is essential to defeat Plato and Seneca, but unfortunately, if you separate out the "argument through logic" and don't explain the context, you're left fixated on a "limit" as if that is the only issue involved, when most assuredly there are many other and more important issues that don't end up being confusing in isolation.

If we talk about pigs and babies and real living things, it's much harder to think in terms of their day to day practical goal being well defined by discussing "limits." The logic argument is invaluable in its context, but can't be taken as the ultimate reasoning. I think Epicurus engaged in it, and we have to also, because we are faced with the necessity of fighting on logical terms if

we want to communicate with people who are interested in ideas, but that doesn't mean that the whole exercise isn't hazardous for both sides. It's easy to omit important points and end up looking bad when taken out of context.

Quote from Torquatus

So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak; the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts.

Also:

[Quote from Don](#)

conflating (on purpose) pleasure and desire. The *desire* for pleasure is infinite

It may well help us to distinguish pleasure and desire like that, but I don't think it would help Plato or Seneca for the reason you mentioned -- they are conflating things *on purpose* because they want to defend their own "god" (virtue, wisdom, etc) as the ultimate end. If you were to point out to them the distinction between pleasure and desire they would just shift off in another direction with another similar argument, maybe reminding you that cows have similar limits, but are you a cow? 😊

There's ultimately no satisfying these people because they have made up their minds and they are not going to change. But we can help a lot of other people - open-minded people - by explaining these issues, so they don't end up confused and lost like [Philebus](#) was at the end of that dialogue.

Post by “Don” of May 19, 2023 at 7:30 PM

VS78 came up in the episode:

The noble soul is devoted most of all to wisdom and to friendship — one a mortal good, the other immortal.

ὁ γενναῖος περὶ σοφίαν καὶ φιλίαν μάλιστα γίγνεται, ὧν τὸ μὲν ἐστὶ θνητὸν ἀγαθόν, τὸ δὲ ἀθάνατον.

This Vatican Saying puzzled me for a long time, and I don't know whether I read this somewhere (probably) or it hit me.

I looked at the words usually rendered mortal and immortal: θνητὸν - liable to death, mortal, opposite: ἀθάνατος literally "un-dying"

Wisdom σοφίαν is mortal because it dies with us. Our own wisdom, what we know, dies with our mind.

Friendship φιλίαν exists after our death in the memories of our friends.

That's how I interpret this saying now.