

Episode One Hundred Thirty Eight - Letter to Menoecus 5 - Pleasure Part One

Post by "Cassius" of September 8, 2022 at 9:24 AM

[Quote from reneliza](#)

I see the concern here, but my thought is that "moving toward pleasure" and "moving away from pain" are not just closely related concepts, but literally exactly identical. If pleasure and pain are the only two feelings, then having less of one means more than the other. The only way to remove pain is to add pleasure. The only way to add pleasure is to remove pain. There is no neutral state in between. There is no intermediary. So life can't be motivated by pleasure without being motivated by pain as well (more of one, less of the other)

But if it's disturbing to think of being driven by a negative, then by all means say that you're motivated to move toward the pleasure found in fulfilling desire rather than ending the pain of desire. Because they're wholly equivalent, one just feels more positive because of perspective.

I think we're seeing in this discussion the difference between (1) making a philosophically logical point vs (2) making a psychologically helpful suggestion to someone struggling with basic issues of life.

Both have their place and proper circumstance, but if we take the statement that is appropriate for one situation and try to apply it to the other, we end up with something that is confusing, disconcerting, and on the face of it "wrong."

That's exactly what I think has been done with the entire issue of the "absence of pain" passages ever since the time of Cicero. Cicero was a lawyer who opposed Epicurean theory so he intentionally used this technique to score debating points and make it appear that Epicurus was logically inconsistent. Everything that ReneLiza says in her post is logically correct as to the identity of "absence of one" being the same as "presence of the other." That logical observation is helpful and necessary in establishing that there is a limit to the quantity of pleasure - the limit is when all pain is gone. And if you're concerned about the issue "Does Pleasure Have A Limit?" because you're debating pleasure with Plato and you have to establish that pleasure does have a "boundary stone," then you're doing a great job and can feel very satisfied that you have proved your point.

But that kind of philosophical debate is not the way that normal people talk, and if you try to talk with them that way you end up confusing them and looking impractical or even a fool.

So we have to find a way to articulate this problem to people who are reading Epicurus so that they are aware of it and can therefore reason themselves out of the way of the difficulty. People

disagreements
osophical war.

124

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHILOLOGY.

MARY N. PORTER PACKER. Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Ethics. New York, The Columbia University Press, 1938. Pp. 127. Columbia Diss.

This study is most commendable. It is clearly written and well printed, acutely reasoned and amply documented. The treatment confines itself to *De Finibus* I-II and is divided into two chapters: 1. Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Philosophy in *De Finibus* I. 2. Cicero's Critique of Epicurean Philosophy, Presented in *De Finibus* I and II. Each chapter concludes with a summary, and the text of Epicurus himself is abundantly cited. The conclusion is that Cicero failed "to understand Epicureanism as a consistently unified philosophy (p. 81)," but is acquitted of having been "deliberately and intentionally unfair (p. 119)."

It is only to this acquittal that I take exception. Every debater has the choice of arguing to reveal the truth in its entirety or of arguing to make points. The former method is adapted to the Supreme Court, the latter to a trial by jury. Cicero was a crafty old trial lawyer and he deliberately argued to make points, because he was pleading before a reading audience, which functions like a jury, and his shrewd legal mind had long discerned the vulnerability of Epicureanism before this style of attack. His attitude was that of William J. Bryan toward biological evolution, and his pleadings are comparable to a Scopes trial, but I do not believe he could have misrepresented the truth so successfully had he not understood it completely. In the Scopes trial, the crafty old lawyer was on the opposite side—Clarence Darrow.

NORMAN W. DEWITT.

VICTORIA COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO.

Cicero was a trial lawyer and in this allegations that Epicurus was being inconsistent he was intentionally misrepresenting Epicurean doctrine. Cicero had a brilliant mind and access to all the texts and Epicurean teachers and he could have chosen to explain Epicurus' viewpoint from a sympathetic and understandable "big picture" viewpoint. Instead, he chose to take these passages we are debating outside of their full context and hold them up as inconsistent and foolish.

If we aren't willing to take a stand ourselves and explain how these interpretations are misrepresenting the truth, then Cicero's arguments will continue to prevail, as they have prevailed for 2000 years already.