

Eat Drink and be Merry!

Post by “Cassius” of September 28, 2023 at 11:28 AM

No one seems to agree on what "pleasure" means, which is why Cicero could take the position that he did and that is currently in our "quote of the week" at the top of the forum.

Torquatus laughed. Come, that is a good joke," he said, "that the author of the doctrine that pleasure is the End of things desirable, the final and ultimate Good, should actually not know what manner of thing pleasure itself is!" "Well," [Cicero] replied, either Epicurus does not know what pleasure is, or the rest of mankind all the world over do not."

- *Torquatus in Cicero's "On Ends" [Book Two III:1 \(Rackham\)](#)*

"What do we mean by pleasure" is the real problem, and I suspect it adds much unnecessary complexity to the issue to have to drill down to decide whether people are talking about "bodily" vs "mental" or "static" vs "kinetic." Those two distinctions strike me as two entirely separate categories of things, and if we aren't clear about what we are talking about at the beginning then we never make any progress. Epicurus seems to be labeling every mental or physical living experience as "pleasure" so long that experience is not explicitly felt to be painful. That labeling right there is the keystone on which everything else stands or falls, and shifting the terminology to whether that should be labeled as kinetic or static just adds confusion.

And as we've discussed, we have only mentions by Cicero and Diogenes Laertius to thank for that terminology shift, which Boris [Nikolsky](#) points out is probably a later overlay and figures not at all in Lucretius or the core material we have from Epicurus himself. Cassius Longinus said to Cicero himself that it is easy to explain how pleasure is the good rather than virtue, and the question that everyone wants to know is how to weigh "sex, drugs, and rock and roll" against what we can lump together under "mental pleasure."

So I would think that *most* conversations in the surviving texts would be oriented toward comparing "mental" vs "bodily" experiences, as that is the obvious practical and threshold question that confronts everyone. Only after you weigh the bodily vs mental would you start talking about types of mental pleasure and getting technical about whether they are "static" vs changing.

Only once you get past that would I think you start drilling down between "types" of mental pleasure.