

Eat Drink and be Merry!

Post by "Cassius" of September 28, 2023 at 1:28 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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."

It is interesting to think about why Cicero could even take this position that Epicurus is unclear as to the meaning of pleasure, and the related accusation that Epicurus did not adhere to standard attitudes toward "definitions," and still remain credible.

Usually someone is concerned enough about their credibility that they don't make claims that are ridiculous on their face, so Cicero must have thought there was a reason that he could get away with accusing Epicurus of being imprecise.

Presumably most of what Epicurus wrote that would have clarified this is lost. It seems that mainly what we have left is the discussion in Menoecus, which seems to presume that we know what pleasure is. Taking that position is consistent with Torquatus' statement that there is no need for logical definition or proof that pleasure is desirable. [*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.*]

The references in Menoecus to pleasure being "the end" do not explicitly tell us what pleasure is, especially given that Epicurus says that we sometimes avoid certain pleasures in favor of pains. The presumption seems to be as is stated in PD3, that "Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once."

To give Cicero his due, it's a powerful argument to say that someone is using a word in a way very different from the standard definition. I think we have good material in Torquatus from which to construct a proper answer in more detail than Cicero allowed Torquatus to present, and I think that any proper response to Cicero really has to focus on this issue.