

Episode 195 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 05

Post by "Cassius" of October 8, 2023 at 8:07 AM

In addition to the excerpt above to indicate where we will start, I have reformatted into dialogue form the text from which we will be reading, because it seems to me it is super-important. I would suggest the possibility that the name of "[Hieronymus of Rhodes](#)" ought to become almost as familiar to us as any of the core Epicureans, because Cicero points out that he stands for exactly the position that many many commentators today allege to be the position of Epicurus. Nevertheless, Torquatus points out that Hieronymus of Rhodes is "grossly mistaken." I think we are going to find that it is very helpful to be able to understand and express clearly the difference between Hieronymus of Rhodes and Epicurus, which this from Book Two of On Ends allows us to do:

Cicero: "Do you understand, then, what Hieronymus of Rhodes declares to be the supreme good, by the standard of which he thinks all things should be judged?"

Torquatus: "I understand that he holds freedom from pain to be the final good."

Cicero: "Well, what view does this same philosopher hold of pleasure?"

Torquatus: "He asserts that it is not essentially an object of desire."

Cicero: "So he is of opinion that joy is one thing, absence of pain another."

Torquatus: "Yes, and he is grossly mistaken, for, as I proved a little while ago, the limit to the increase of pleasure consists in the removal of all pain."

Cicero: "I shall examine afterwards, what is the sense of your expression absence of pain, but that pleasure means one thing, absence of pain another, you must grant me, unless you prove very obstinate."

Torquatus: "Oh, but you will find me obstinate in this matter, for no doctrine can be more truly stated."

Cicero: "Pray, does a man when thirsty find pleasure in drinking?"

Torquatus: "Who could say no to that?"

Cicero: "The same pleasure that he feels when the thirst has been quenched?"

Torquatus: "No, a pleasure different in kind. For the quenching of the thirst brings with it a steady pleasure, whereas the pleasure which accompanies the process of quenching itself

consists in agitation."

Cicero: "Why then do you describe two things so different by the same name?"

Torquatus: "Do you not recollect what I said a little while since, that when once all pain has been removed pleasure admits of varieties but not of increase?"

Cicero: "I do indeed remember, but though your statement is in good Latin, it is far from clear. For variety is a Latin word, and is in its strict sense applied to differences of colour, but is metaphorically used to denote many differences; we speak of a varied poem, varied speech, varied manners, varied fortune, pleasure too is usually called varied when it is derived from many unlike objects which produce pleasures that are unlike. If you intended this by the term variety, I should understand it, as indeed I do understand the word when you are not the speaker; I am far from clear what the variety is of which you speak, when you say that we experience the highest pleasure as often as we are without pain, when however we are eating things which rouse a pleasurable agitation in our senses, then the pleasure consists in the agitation, which produces a variety in our pleasures, but that the pleasure felt in absence of pain is not thereby increased; and why you should call that feeling pleasure, I cannot understand."

Torquatus: "Can then anything be sweeter than to feel no pain?"

Cicero: "Nay, be it granted that there is nothing better, for I am not yet investigating that question; does it therefore follow that painlessness, so to call it, is identical with pleasure?"

Torquatus: "It is quite identical, and is the greatest possible, and no pleasure can be greater."

Cicero: "Why then, when once you have so deigned your supreme good as to make it consist entirely in absence of pain, do you shrink from embracing, maintaining, and championing this exclusively? I ask what need there is for you to introduce pleasure into the assembly of the virtues, like some harlot into a company of matrons? The name of pleasure is odious, disreputable, open to suspicion. So you are in the habit of telling us this, very often, that we do not understand what kind of pleasure Epicurus means. Now whenever I have been told this (and I have been told it not unfrequently) I have the habit of getting now and then a little angry, though I usually bear myself with tolerable calmness in discussion. Do I not understand what hedone means in Greek and voluptas in Latin? Which, pray, of the two languages is it that I do not know? Next, how comes it that I do not know this, though all those are aware of it, whoever they be, that have chosen to become Epicureans? And this is a point argued by your school most admirably, that a man who is to become a philosopher has no need to be acquainted with literature. Thus just as our ancestors brought old Cincinnatus from his plough to make him dictator, so you gather from every village men who are indeed worthies, but surely not very well educated. They then understand what Epicurus means, and I do not?"

Cicero: To let you know that I do understand, first declare that by voluptas I mean what he means by hedone. Now though we often search for a Latin word equivalent to a Greek word and conveying the same sense, in this case there was no need to search. No word can possibly be

discovered which more exactly represents in Latin the sense of a Greek word than voluptas. All men everywhere who know Latin denote by this word two things, delight existing in the mind and a sweet agreeable agitation in the body. In fact the character in Trabea's play describes delight as excessive pleasure in the mind, just like the character in Caecilius, who gives out that he is delighted with all delights. But there is this distinction, that voluptas is applied also to the mind (an immoral feeling, as the Stoics think, who deign it as an irrational elevation of the mind when it fancies itself in the enjoyment of some great blessing) while laetitia and gaudium are not used in connexion with the body. But according to the usage of all who speak Latin, pleasure consists in feeling that kind of agreeableness which agitates some one of the senses. This agreeableness too you may apply metaphorically if you please to the mind; for we use the phrase to affect agreeably in both cases, and in connexion with it the word agreeable; if only you understand that midway between the man who says I am enriched with such delight that I am unsteadied and the man who cries now at last is my heart on fire, one of whom is transported with delight, while the other is racked by pain, comes this man's speech though this our acquaintance is quite recent, for he is neither in a state of delight nor of torture; and also that between him who is master of exquisite bodily pleasures and him who is tormented by the intensest pains comes he who is removed from both states.

Cicero: "Do you think then that I sufficiently grasp the force of expressions, or am I even at my age to be taught to speak either Greek or Latin? And, putting that aside, even granting that I do not clearly comprehend what Epicurus means, though I have, I believe, a clear knowledge of Greek, look to it that there be not some fault in him who uses such language that he is not understood."