

Episode 196 - The Epicurean Arguments In Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 06

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 3:05 PM

[Quote from Diogenes Laertius](#)

[136] Epicurus differs from the Cyrenaics about pleasure. For they do not admit static pleasure, but only that which consists in motion. But Epicurus admits both kinds both in the soul and in the body, as he says in the work on Choice and Avoidance and in the book on The Ends of Life and in the first book On Lives and in the letter to his friends in Mytilene. Similarly, Diogenes in the 17th book of Miscellanies and Metrodorus in the Timocrates speak thus: 'Pleasure can be thought of both as consisting in motion and as static.' And Epicurus in the work on Choice speaks as follows: 'Freedom from trouble in the mind and from pain in the body are static pleasures, but Joy and exultation are considered as active pleasures involving motion. '

When your mind is not being excited, but is operating at its normal speed and doing its normal things, is that something that can be well conveyed in English using the word "static"?

When your body is not being stimulated through massage or in any other ways that moves the senses from their standard state of good health and operation, can that condition be conveyed using the word "static"?

Even more so, an untranslated Greek word does not convey what is sought to be conveyed. To be clear, the untranslated word has to immediately be explained, or else you are left with an impasse with the Ciceros of the world, and the normal reasonable man is going to agree with Cicero. Just as Cicero said, this is not a dark subject where use of technical language can be excused. This calls for clarity, and I feel sure that Epicurus gave the explanation with clarity, and that our problem arises because the clear and detailed explanation did not survive, not that he or his later heads of the school refused to give one.

To be fair, part of the problem may be that it *does* survive but we do not see it due to translation issues and our own prejudices. Statements like [PD08](#) that no pleasure is a bad thing in itself may be intended to show in the negative that all pleasure is desirable, and that we are to treat these statements as logical axioms which allow of no exceptions and have to be carried to their logical extremes.

So whether we are talking about "defining katastematic" or just being clear in the first place, the challenge is the same - we need to convey what is being discussed in plain English. Healthy operation of body and healthy operation of mind are not *that* hard to designate clearly, and

we need to find better ways to do so.

It isn't a full explanation to say "Absence of pain is pleasure, and that the greatest pleasure" which is basically all Cicero allows Torquatus to do in answer to Cicero's questioning.

I will admit that I am getting the idea that there is a deeper mystery here. How did it ever get to the point in 50BC that Cicero could make a colorable argument that the relationship between pleasure and absence of pain was not being explained satisfactorily even by the Epicureans themselves? It's almost as if (A) the Emperor Julian in celebrating the disappearance of the texts, and (B) Cicero saying that no one but Epicureans read the Epicurean texts (I think that was Cicero, wasn't it?), and (C) Cicero warning Torquatus not to argue that the Epicureans didn't enjoy literature, because Epicurus never argued that, and (D) Philodemus complaining about people who were oversimplifying ---- are all pointing us toward a problem that was developing in the decades between Epicurus and Cicero.

How could it get to the point where Cicero could make this argument that Epicurus was unclear and hope to be taken seriously? Was our problem of lack of transmission of texts already beginning then?

I think that's something else we need to explore.