

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

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 4:34 PM

Thus, the Epicurean view of the physical nature of pleasure as a whole varies little from that of other philosophers: in Epicurus' opinion, pleasure is experienced when the atoms of a human body, acted upon by a certain force, find themselves in their proper places, i.e., when the organism attains its natural state under the effect of some influence. Epicurus, however, differed from his predecessors on one essential point. When speaking about pleasure as restoration, Plato and his followers meant by this only the process of restoration, separating this process from its result and believing that it leads to a neutral state, a state of rest, when both pleasure and pain are absent. Proceeding from this, they proved that pleasure cannot be the actual good and end: from their point of view, it is a process of becoming leading to another end different from it – the absence of pain. For example, when we satisfy hunger, the end is not pleasure but the state of satiety regarded by the Academics as neutral.²⁴ By contrast, I propose, and aiming to refute this argument, Epicurus links pleasure not only with the process but also with the result of restoration, i.e., with the natural state which the organism attains. In connection with this new interpretation of pleasure Epicurus introduces his own term *κατάστημα*; unlike the Academy's term *κατάστασις*, cognate with it, it denoted the result and not the process of restoration. If we take into account all those associations with the traditional description of pleasure which the root verb *καθίστημι* carried, and also if we do not ignore the description of the nature of

issue, but here is

²⁴ See, for example, Plato *Philebus* 54a ff.

pleasure in the passage from Lucretius cited above, there is hardly any reason to believe that Epicurus denoted by this term a perfectly neutral state, a state where both pain and positive pleasure are absent. It would be more reasonable to assume that, when speaking about 'the good state of the body' (εὐσταθὲς κατάστημα), Epicurus meant such a state which is necessarily the effect of some external force restoring or supporting the organism.²⁵ Such an interpretation of the given concept appears to be corroborated by a number of other facts as well.

Among the *Vatican Sayings* there is one saying by Epicurus in which 'the good state of the body' is explained by three examples – 'not to be hungry, thirsty, or cold.'²⁶ One may get the impression that what this implies is simply the absence of pain, i.e., a neutral state. However, if we take a closer look at how Epicurus explains cases of a similar kind, it will appear that he views this state in an entirely different way. As for the first two states that are mentioned here, 'not to be hungry' and 'not to be thirsty,' they are inseparable from the process of satisfying hunger and thirst and from the external influence on the organism thanks to which man satisfies these desires, i.e., from eating and drinking. For example, in his *Letter to Menoeceus*²⁷ Epicurus states that even bread and water can confer the highest possible pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips. Obviously, Epicurus means by this the state of satiety, but he does not in any way separate it from pleasure from eating and drinking that leads to this state. Apparently, the Epicureans similarly interpreted the meaning of their statement, known to us from Plutarch²⁸ and Athenaeus,²⁹ that the beginning and root of every good is a pleasure of the stomach. Again,