

Episode 201 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 09

Post by "Joshua" of November 12, 2023 at 12:06 PM

Show Notes:

Attic Nights by 2nd century grammarian [Aulus Gellius](#)

On Plutarch "word-chasing" and logic-chopping;

Quote

Plutarch, in the second book of his essay *On Homer*, asserts that Epicurus made use of an incomplete, perverted and faulty syllogism, and he quotes Epicurus's own words: "[Death is nothing to us](#), for what is dissolved is without perception, and what is without perception is nothing to us." "Now Epicurus," says Plutarch, "omitted what he ought to have stated as his major premise, that death is a dissolution of body and soul, and then, to prove something else, he goes on to use the very premise that he had omitted, as if it had been stated and conceded. But this syllogism," says Plutarch, "cannot advance, unless that premise be first presented."

What Plutarch wrote as to the form and sequence of a syllogism is true enough; for if you wish to argue and reason according to the teaching of the schools, you ought to say: "Death is the dissolution of soul and body; but what is dissolved is without perception; and what is without perception is nothing to us." But we cannot suppose that Epicurus, being the man he was, omitted that part of the syllogism through ignorance, or that it was his intention to state a syllogism complete in all its members and limitations, as is done in the schools of the logicians; but since the separation of body and soul by death is self-evident, he of course did not think it necessary to call attention to what was perfectly obvious to everyone. For the same reason, too, he put the conclusion of the syllogism, not at the end, but at the beginning; for who does not see that this also was not due to inadvertence??

In the same book, Plutarch also finds fault a second time with Epicurus for using an inappropriate word and giving it an incorrect meaning. Now Epicurus wrote as follows: "The utmost height of pleasure is the removal of everything that pains." Plutarch declares that he ought not to have said "of everything that pains," but "of everything that is painful"; for it is the removal of pain, he explains, that should be indicated, not of that which causes pain.

In bringing this charge against Epicurus Plutarch is "word-chasing" with excessive minuteness and almost with frigidity; for far from hunting up such verbal

meticulousness and such refinements of diction, Epicurus hunts them down.

[full text](#)

Aristotle's work *On Categories*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categories_\(Aristotle\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categories_(Aristotle))

Quote

The Categories (Greek Κατηγορίαι Katēgoriai; Latin Categoriae or Praedicamenta) is a text from Aristotle's Organon that enumerates all the possible kinds of things that can be the subject or the predicate of a proposition. They are "perhaps the single most heavily discussed of all Aristotelian notions".[1] The work is brief enough to be divided, not into books as is usual with Aristotle's works, but into fifteen chapters.

[full text](#)

Cicero continually conflates *the feeling of pleasure* with *things productive of pleasure*, but he forgets his Aristotle; the feeling of pleasure is a subject, while "things productive of pleasure" are predicative on the subject of pleasure. He compounds this error by committing it repeatedly and at length.

While pleasure has manifold causes, it is itself one thing--the feeling of pleasure. It is *subject* to a variety of different conditions (which we express as predicates); quantity (duration), quality (intensity), location, time reference (i.e. *I felt pleasure yesterday* or *feel pleasure now* or *anticipate pleasure in the future*), and so on. Does Cicero not understand this, or does he pretend that it is beyond comprehension for the effect of argument? I think we know the answer.

Cicero, *Pro Plancio*

Cicero pretends to be scandalized at Epicurus' mention of the pleasures of sex, and insists that he would need to apologize before even naming it, but in a trial defending Gnaeus Plancius who was accused of bribery in an election, Cicero casually dismisses an allegation that Plancius and his friends raped an actress;

Quote

And would you dim with your sullyng insinuations the lustre of that untarnished life ? You hint darkly at acts of immorality, charges which cannot even be suspected, far less substantiated, against him. Not content with inventing charges, you invent names for your charges, and call him " bigamist." You say that he took with him to the province a

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companion to be the instrument of his base passions ; this statement is not a charge, but a reckless and libellous falsehood. You say that he raped a ballet-girl ; we hear that this crime was once committed at Atina by a band of youths who took advantage of an old privilege allowed at the scenic games, especially in country towns. ** [31] What a tribute to the propriety of my client's youthful days. He is reproached with an act which he was permitted by privilege to commit, and yet even that reproach is found to be baseless. You say that he released a criminal from prison. True, but the release was inadvertent, as you are aware, and was ordered at the request of an excellent young man whose claims upon my client were not to be put by ; and a warrant was subsequently issued for the re-arrest of the prisoner. These, gentlemen, and these alone, are the scandals alleged against my client's life, and it is on these that you are asked to base your doubts of his scrupulous honour and integrity.

Again, as I said during the recording, I should not have seen the need to mention this case if Cicero had not insinuated that Epicurus was a sexual pervert.

Cicero, *On Ends*, Book I

Cicero attempts to lure Epicurus into absurdity by asking whether absence of pleasure is the most intense pain; he forgets that Torquatus has given us his answer: if you consider the description of the life of pleasure in its most complete form, then the opposite of this life is certainly a life of anguish.

Quote

Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

Suppose on the other hand a person crushed beneath the heaviest load of mental and of bodily anguish to which humanity is liable. Grant him no hope of ultimate relief in view, also give him no pleasure either present or in prospect. Can one describe or imagine a more pitiable state? If then a life full of pain is the thing most to be avoided, it follows that to live in pain is the highest evil; and this position implies that a life of pleasure is the ultimate good. In fact the mind possesses nothing in itself upon which it

can rest as final. Every fear, every sorrow can be traced back to pain; there is no other thing besides pain which is of its own nature capable of causing either anxiety or distress.