

# Episode 204 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 12 - More On The "Jurisdiction" Question

Post by "Cassius" of December 6, 2023 at 4:44 PM

As per some comments in the thread for Episode 203, in 204 we return to the discussion of whether it was accurate of Cicero to allege that Epicurus relied \*solely\* on the senses for his deduction that pleasure is the highest good.

Joshua points out in this current episode that what Torquatus really said in book one was (note the underlining):

## Quote

IX. I will start then in the manner approved by the author of the system himself, by settling what are the essence and qualities of the thing that is the object of our inquiry; not that I suppose you to be ignorant of it, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil. This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict.

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature.

What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance? Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect

and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain.

Based on the underlined parts I think we have a clear line that "the senses alone" are not really the end of the story for Epicurus. Here's a couple of questions;

1. What does "at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict" really mean? Isn't it a given of Epicurean theory of the senses that the senses themselves simply report what they receive 'without evaluation'? Well, isn't deciding whether something is pleasing or painful an "evaluation" of at least a sort?
2. "For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident." -
  1. Doesn't both "notice" and especially "reminder" indicate something more than a present sense impression? "Reminder" seems to evoke memory, and if I recall correctly somewhere else it is stated that the senses themselves have no memory.
3. The line "as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them" contains at least two relevant aspects:
  1. Aren't "hot," "white," and "sweet" evaluations of a sort? Certainly those terms as words are concepts.
  2. Isn't drawing "attention" to them something that involves more than just the operation of the senses?
4. "Can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason" might not be a reference to a logical proof, but the action of the consciousness to grasp something that involves prolepsis or whatever the separate faculty of pleasure/pain really is.
5. "Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a "notion" "naturally implanted in our minds."
  1. This phrasing ("notion" and "naturally implanted") seems pretty clearly to evoke the likelihood that prolepsis is involved.

Now this last item 5 seems to belong to a list that Torquatus is not attributing to Epicurus himself, but I think that there's ample reason even in what Torquatus has said to think that Cicero was overstating his case to say that Epicurus was relying \*only\* on the five senses.

We didn't spend an overly long amount of time talking about this but I think it's an important point worth further thought.