

Episode 216 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 23 - Why Does Epicurus Say Length Of Time Does Not Contribute To Pleasure?

Post by "Cassius" of February 25, 2024 at 12:23 PM

Today Cicero hit the panel with one of the toughest questions in Epicurean philosophy, summarized in one way as: "If a life of pleasure is the good, why isn't a longer life of pleasure better than a shorter life of pleasure?"

We struggled through some initial thoughts, which I will get edited and posted as soon as I can. However this question will be extended throughout the next several episodes, so we will have an opportunity to grapple with this key issue.

Here is the heart of Cicero's argument:

But I shall be reminded (as you said yourself) that Epicurus will not admit that continuance of time contributes anything to happiness, or that less pleasure is realized in a short period of time than if the pleasure were eternal. These statements are most inconsistent ; for while he places his supreme good in pleasure, he refuses to allow that pleasure can reach a greater height in a life of boundless extent, than in one limited and moderate in length. He who places good entirely in virtue can say that happiness is consummated by the consummation of virtue, since he denies that time brings additions to his supreme good; but when a man supposes that happiness is caused by pleasure, how are his doctrines to be reconciled, if he means to affirm that pleasure is not heightened by duration? In that case, neither is pain. Or, though all the most enduring pains are also the most wretched, does length of time not render pleasure more enviable? What reason then has Epicurus for calling a god, as he does, both happy and eternal? If you take away his eternity, Jupiter will be not a whit happier than Epicurus, since both of them are in the enjoyment of the supreme good, which is pleasure.