

# 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 28, 2024 at 12:53 PM

I posted this following quote over in another recent thread but it also belongs here. I am strongly dissatisfied with how hard it seems to be to balance this time issue in many of our discussions. Yes, it's not necessary to live a longer time in order to experience "complete pleasure," because once you are complete it never gets more complete. But if life is desirable, as Epicurus also says, then "living" contains a time element, and so a longer pleasant life is still more desirable than a shorter pleasant life, even though the pleasure never gets more "complete," it only varies.

Both are true - the pleasure never gets more complete, but a longer time is also desirable. This language in Menoecus needs to be parsed closely: "And just as with food he does not seek **simply** the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant." I will leave it to the Greek experts to expound on the Greek, but to be consistent with the rest of what he is saying it seems to me that Epicurus has to be saying that both points are true -- length of time experiencing pleasure is in fact an aspect of experiencing pleasure (it is one among many, but the three primary are time, intensity, and part of the organism involved, per [PD09](#)), but another aspect of experiencing pleasure is that once you experience "complete" pleasure then pleasure never gets more "complete."

We're seeing in many discussions strong implication that length of time is not relevant to pleasure at all, and to me that would be like saying that manner of death or time of death is not relevant at all. That's patently not true - it is preferable to die a painless death rather than painful death, and it is preferable to live a longer happy life than a shorter happy life.

The need to work further on expressing this better, including finding the sources that explain the warped Stoic view that Lucian is ridiculing here, and this is a much more important issue than many that we often discuss.

## [Quote from Lucian's Hermotimus](#)

Lycinus. You must be of good cheer and keep a stout heart; gaze at the end of your climb and the Happiness at the top, and remember that he is working with you. What prospect does he hold out? when are you to be up? does he think you will be on the top next year—by the Great Mysteries, or the Panathenaea, say?

Hermotimus. Too soon, Lycinus.

Lycinus. By next Olympiad, then?

Hermotimus. All too short a time, even that, for habituation to Virtue and attainment of Happiness.

Lycinus. Say two Olympiads, then, for an outside estimate. You may fairly be found guilty of laziness, if you cannot get it done by then; the time would allow you three return trips from the Pillars of Heracles to India, with a margin for exploring the tribes on the way instead of sailing straight and never stopping. How much higher and more slippery, pray, is the peak on which your Virtue dwells than that Aornos crag which Alexander stormed in a few days?

Hermotimus. There is no resemblance, Lycinus; this is not a thing, as you conceive it, to be compassed and captured quickly, though ten thousand Alexanders were to assault it; in that case, the sealers would have been legion. As it is, a good number begin the climb with great confidence, and do make progress, some very little indeed, others more; but when they get half-way, they find endless difficulties and discomforts, lose heart, and turn back, panting, dripping, and exhausted. But those who endure to the end reach the top, to be blessed thenceforth with wondrous days, looking down from their height upon the ants which are the rest of mankind.

Lycinus. Dear me, what tiny things you make us out—not so big as the Pygmies even, but positively groveling on the face of the earth. I quite understand it; your thoughts are up aloft already. And we, the common men that walk the earth, shall mingle you with the Gods in our prayers; for you are translated above the clouds, and gone up whither you have so long striven.

Hermotimus. If but that ascent might be, Lycinus! but it is far yet.

Lycinus. But you have never told me how far, in terms of time.

Hermotimus. No; for I know not precisely myself. My guess is that it will not be more than twenty years; by that time I shall surely be on the summit.

Lycinus. Mercy upon us, you take long views!

Hermotimus. Ay; but, as the toil, so is the reward.

Lycinus. That may be; but about these twenty years—have you your master's promise that you will live so long? Is he prophet as well as philosopher? Or is it a soothsayer or Chaldean expert that you trust? Such things are known to them, I understand. You would never, of course, if there were any uncertainty of your life's lasting to the Virtue-point, slave and toil night and day like this; why, just as you were close to the top, your fate might come upon you, lay hold of you by the heel, and lug you down with your

hopes unfulfilled.

Hermotimus. God forbid! these are words of ill omen, Lycinus; may life be granted me, that I may grow wise, and have if it be but one day of Happiness!

Lycinus. For all these toils will you be content with your one day?

Hermotimus. Content? Yes, or with the briefest moment of it.

Lycinus. But is there indeed Happiness up there—and worth all the pains? How can you tell? You have never been up yourself.

Hermotimus. I trust my master's word; and he knows well; is he not on the topmost height?

Lycinus. Oh, do tell me what he says about it; what is Happiness like? wealth, glory, pleasures incomparable?

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