

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 29, 2024 at 8:15 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus answers that by saying pleasure cannot rise to greater heights than the absence of all pain, therefore, pleasure cannot be added to once it has replaced all pain.

Still thinking about this, and to repeat a point from post 23, I think a danger in emphasizing this "pleasure cannot be added to once it has replaced all pain" part of the perspective is that the superficial point overwhelms the deeper point. While it is true that once "all pain is removed no more pleasure can be added," that situation is effectively limited only to "the gods." If we obsess over the goal of eliminating "all pain" then we are trying to duplicate Zeus, which we can never fully do.

Now we can approximate Zeus *figuratively*, and I think that's what Epicurus is talking about as "competing with Zeus" and "living as a god among men." But that distinction between *literally* eliminating all pain and becoming a Zeus, vs *figuratively* eliminating as much pain as possible so you can run with Zeus for a while, is very important.

What I think a lot of writers about Epicurus are doing is saying that your literal goal is to *be* Zeus by draining every drop of pain from experience, and they imply the best way to do that is live on bread and water in a cave. When living ascetically fails to satisfy us, as it always will, we set ourselves up for disappointment and thus fail to be as happy as we could otherwise. So from that perspective wanting to *be* Zeus would be a natural but *unnecessary* desire - unnecessary because while the variation is desirable, we can live approximately like Zeus while we are alive and say we have tasted the same thing. Frustration at not being perfect doesn't become an enemy of living a good pleasant life.

So to repeat what I think is the main point that needs center stage:

You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate -- and you will also find nothing more pleasurable than pleasure.

This does in fact place pleasure in the same category of "completable" or "graspable" things as virtue, which as [Joshua](#) stated in the podcast, could be a concern --- but the concern isn't a problem when you see that the main issue is not that the perfect is being made the enemy of

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the good, but in fact the perfect is a "concept" that is being used as a guide toward the good, never to be confused with our actual experience. That's another application too of "all models are wrong, but some models are useful." Neither the words "virtue" nor "pleasure" exist as entities out in the universe on their own - they are just conceptions of the human mind, but when viewed properly they are very useful conceptions.