

# 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 12:36 PM

## [Quote from Don](#)

"Therefore the power and the greatness of virtue cannot rise to greater heights, because increase is denied to that which is superlatively great. You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate. 9. Every virtue is limitless; for limits depend upon definite measurements. Constancy cannot advance further, any more than fidelity, or truthfulness, or loyalty. What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.[5] What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect."

The closer you look at this the more clear it is, so we can thank Seneca in addition to Cicero.

Part of why this is complex to us is because of the multiple meanings of "limits", but Seneca makes it clear:

Every virtue is limitless; for limits depend upon definite measurements.

That's the sentence that shines the spotlight - what they are talking about when they are talking about limits is not "the highest" or "the best" but whether a thing can be measured with definite measurements.

Saying that "Absence of pain = pleasure" does not primarily refer to the "most intense" or "longest" or "widest scope of the organism" - it refers first and most importantly to a definite measurement which can be grasped and understood.

"Absence of pain" is important because it is a definite measurement of pleasure.

It is only by recognizing that "absence of pain equals pleasure" that we can conceptualize a definite amount of pleasure, and that applies regardless of whether we are talking about a length of time, a part of the body, a measure of intensity ---- or an entire lifetime.

Somewhere along the way the Stoics apparently took this to the ridiculous extreme exhibited in Hermotimus that a moment at the top of the mountain of virtue would be worth a lifetime of effort. That makes no more sense than arguing that a moment of "pure pleasure" is worth a lifetime of effort.

But along the way, the observation that a definite measurement is possible allows you to talk about a goal and to see that no matter how long you live, the experience of pleasure never gets "better" than before - it only varies. And yes more experiences of pleasure are desirable, so it is desirable to live longer, but you can die knowing that you have not missed pleasure that was "better" than what you actually experienced while you were alive.

This perspective also fits along well with Martin's example of the set level of temperature which we have discussed a number of times and which Onenski brought up last night.