

Would Epicurus say: "Infinite Time contains no more pain than limited time when the limit of pain is measured by reason?"

Post by "Cassius" of July 21, 2024 at 9:58 PM

Just to answer the original question myself, here is my current thought:

I am open to the possibility that Epicurus WOULD say that "Infinite Time contains no more pain than limited time when the limit of pain is measured by reason," and here is why I am thinking that is possible:

As I see it, heart of the doctrine is that "full cannot be made more full no matter how long the time frame." If that is correct, then the analogy of it being impossible to make a full vessel being made "more full" over time applies no matter what is placed inside it.

The doctrine as written refers to "pleasure," but it would be just as true if it said "pleasures" or if it referred to any specific type of pleasure. The point being made is a "logical" point unrelated to the specifics of pleasure or pain. You could equally say the limit of quantity of "happiness" or "sadness" or any other human emotion or attribute, because the point is simply that "full means full" and it can never be made "more full" when you have a limited vessel.

So while it's likely that the "Limit of pain" is less interesting to discuss than the "limit of pleasure," I am open to the possibility, and at the moment tend toward the conclusion, that the same reasoning that must be used to gain a proper interpretation of the doctrine as written would apply even if the word "pain" were substituted.

I think probably why Twentier and I are for the moment reaching different conclusions is that Twentier is introducing into the hypothetical the question of death. I am thinking that the heart of the doctrine is the meaning of being "full." If that is the case, then the question of death is not truly relevant to the hypothetical. Yes the reason "limited time" is in fact limited is "death," but introducing death as the reason for the limitation brings into play something that doesn't affect the reason why the quantity of something in limited time is the same as in unlimited time.

[Quote from Twentier](#)

"No more pain" is not the same as "continuous pleasure" because "no more pain" also includes "death", and that's no good. This is where we dodge the Cyrenaics accusation that our goal in life is that of a corpse.

Now if "full of pain" were to mean "instant automatic death" then I can see that making a difference to the reasoning, but my first thought is that I doubt that Epicurus would have gone in that direction. Because I think the key point of the hypothetical is "you can't get more full than full," and not "total pain means instant death." It's interesting to consider whether going in that direction would lead to a correct conclusion, but I would see that as a separate issue.

At least the way I am looking at this right now.....