

# Episode 251 - Cicero's OTNOTG 26 - How Niagara Falls Helps Us Understand the Flux, the Heap, and the Epicurean Gods

Post by "Don" of October 26, 2024 at 1:20 PM

## [Quote from Cassius](#)

And applying that last observation about heaps and waterfalls to the statement in the letter to Menoecus:

*"When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind."*

Given that we know that Epicurus DOES accept the pleasures of profligates and the pleasures of sensuality as pleasures, the better interpretation of what he is saying is incorporate Epicurus's position on the heap/river questions, to the effect that:

We should not identify the concept of pleasure as being limited ONLY to the particular pleasures of profligates or sensuality (such as sex, food, drink, etc) because that is not our definition of pleasure as the goal. The concept of Pleasure, which we take as our definition of the ultimate good, includes NOT ONLY those particular pleasures but ALSO all other pleasures, such as those of the mind, literature, art, calmness, etc. This "Pleasure as the good" does not exist as a Platonic ideal, it exists and is recognized only by our perception of many particular pleasures. The unifying characteristic of any set of particular pleasures is not that they reflect or partake of some ideal Platonic form or Aristotelian essence, but that we feel it to be pleasure, rather than feeling it to be pain.

It has always made sense to mentally insert an "ONLY" so as to read "When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean ONLY the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality..." given that we know that sensuality and even the things that profligates do are pleasurable. But placing this sentence in the context of the sorites/heap/waterfall/river question gives us a context in which to supply the missing "only." Waterfalls and rivers and heaps are not ONLY individual grains of sand or drops of water, they are a composite of the individual particles. Pleasure is not ONLY sensuality, but it is also *all feelings of all experiences in life which are not painful, because that is a necessary deduction from there being only two feelings, pleasure or*

*pain, into one of which category all feelings must be placed.*

You can't recognize heaps or waterfalls or rivers without recognizing their components, and you can't recognize Pleasure as the good without recognizing all the individual pleasures of which the concept of Pleasure is composed.

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I'm going to push back a little on this interpretation of *Menoikeus* 131.

First, there is no "only" in the text. If you choose to insert that, that's up to you; but it's not there and I think that "only" adds a different - not necessarily intended by its author - interpretation. I believe Epicurus is clearly marking a contrast between his philosophy and the Cyrenaics with this section in the letter. While Epicurus is saying that he recognizes all that does not cause pain as under the category of "Pleasure is the telos," I don't believe he's "endorsing" the "pleasures of the "profligate/prodigious" (ἄσωτος)" as a way of life. I don't think that's what Cassius is saying either, but I want to make it clear that - from what I read here in this text and elsewhere - Epicurus is not endorsing the "sex, drugs, and rock n roll" lifestyle of the ἄσωτος (Read the quote from my commentary on that word below). Did Epicurus engage in drinking, revelry, etc.? Sure, I got no problem with that. Did he go on binges of drinking to find himself hungover and nauseated? Definitely not, as far as I'm concerned.

So, I think that suggested "only" is a dangerous interpolation to add to the text without an abundance of commentary... hence my little contribution below.

(PS: Full disclosure-- In re-reading my excerpt, I see I \*too\* added an "only" 😊 However, I would say I have a slightly different reason for adding it, relative to the Cyrenaic issue.)

I'm going to also add my commentary from my Letter to Menoikeus here:

Quote from Letter To Menoikeus Commentary

**131g. Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν,**

- [οὖν] Ὅταν λέγωμεν "Therefore, whenever we say..."
- ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, "the fact is that pleasure is the τέλος..."
  - We encountered ὑπάρχειν back in verse 125 with the meaning of "the fact is..."
  - I highly recommend going back to the end of commentary on verse 128 for a look at the implications and nuance of τέλος.
- "Therefore, whenever we say that pleasure is the τέλος..."

Warning! We're heading into the grammar weeds for a little while. Stay close!

There are two different verbs in 131g and 131h (our next line): λέγωμεν and λέγομεν

- λέγωμεν (subjunctive)
- λέγομεν (indicative)
  - Both are conjugations of λέγω. Λέγω originally meant "lay down" but came to mean "lay down an argument" or simply "say" or "speak."

The subjunctive mood has several uses. I believe what's going on here is the subjunctive with λέγωμεν in the indefinite clause is an exhortation "referring to repeated actions in indefinite present time." So what Epicurus is saying is that "we repeatedly say 'pleasure is the τέλος' all the time" when he uses λέγωμεν. Yes, you can say all that with one word in Greek.

The negative indicative οὐ λέγομεν in 131h, on the other hand, is a statement of fact: "we do not say." Period. There's no equivocation, no wiggle room. It's a statement of fact. "We say repeatedly all the time 'pleasure is the τέλος.' We do not say..."

Let's move on to see what we do not say.

### **131h.i. οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν,**

- οὐ ...λέγομεν, "we don't say ..."
- τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς "the pleasure of those who are ἀσώτων"
  - ἀσώτων (genitive of ἄσωτος (asōtos)
  - LSJ defines ἄσωτος as "having no hope of safety, in desperate case; abandoned; spendthrift, profligate." The Latin synonym given is *perditus* "squander, dissipate, waste, throw away, lost"

A quick diversion on ἄσωτος is in order. For those readers with a background in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the parable of the Prodigal Son uses this exact word to describe the lifestyle chosen by the wayward son: *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.* (Luke 15:13, KJV) Here ἄσωτος is translated as "riotous living." The word also occurs in one other place, this time in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures (known to Christians as the "Old" Testament) to describe a sex worker, calling her ἀνεπτρωμένη "inciting" and ἄσωτος "carnal." (Proverbs 7:11) The original connotation of "having no hope" or "lost" gives an extra dimension to the word. The word literally is formed from ἀ- ("not") + σώζω (sōizō "save"): "not saved, lost, desperate." That sense, along with the "extravagant, prodigal, profligate," gives me a much richer sense of what Epicurus's point was.

It needs to also be pointed out that, unlike those Biblical references, there's no moral judgment being passed here. All pleasure is good. It's a question of the consequences. We'll discuss this after we examine how Epicurus describes the pleasure of those who are described as ἄσωτος.

### **131h.ii. ...καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν,**

We return now to an examination of the second phrase on what "we don't say" that pleasure is: **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας.**

We can now address the variations and connotations of the word ἀπολαύσει noted above (124h and 130g). For those who would like more context for this discussion, there was an extensive thread on verses 131 and 132 on the *EpicureanFriends* online forum, some of which has been incorporated into my commentary here.

In 131h.ii, the word ἀπολαύσει is part of a prepositional phrase (ἐν ἀπολαύσει) which is embedded within the phrase τὰς κειμένας. Therefore, we have to unpack ἐν ἀπολαύσει, τὰς κειμένας, and τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας, and have to examine Epicurus's other uses of the word to be able to propose an interpretation of these verses.

Above, I brought up that ἀπολαύσει and its variants convey the idea of enjoyment, specifically "to have enjoyment of a thing, have the benefit of it." It can also convey "enjoy an advantage from some source." This also implies enjoyment of something external to oneself. One source from 1572 stated that the word could also be translated into Latin by *oblectationem* or *delectationem*. These also imply enjoyment of physical or sensual pleasures:

- oblectatio "a delighting, delight (a favorite word of Cicero)"
- delectatio "a delighting, delight, pleasure, amusement"

ἀπολαύσει, at its most basic meaning, is the "act of enjoying, fruition" or the "result of enjoying, pleasure." Again, this implies enjoying the benefit of something, as discussed in 124h and 130g with the additional meaning of "advantage got from a thing." To get another older perspective on the meaning of ἀπολαύσει, I also consulted the *Glossaria duo* (1572) by Henri Estienne (1528-1598).

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Interestingly, the synonyms are "Potiri, Frui, Perfrui; Fruicio" (To possess, to enjoy, to enjoy; I enjoy) conveying the enjoying of the fruits of something or even to possess something. Fruor is defined as "to derive enjoyment from a thing, to enjoy, delight in (with a more restricted signif. than use, to make use of a thing, to use it; to have the use and enjoyment of a thing." This sense is very clear in the use of **ἀπόλαυσις** in Vatican Saying 27, where the "fruit" is explicitly included in the connotation:

*Whereas other pursuits yield their fruit only to those who have practiced them to perfection, in the love and practice of wisdom knowledge is accompanied by **delight**; for here **enjoying** comes along with learning, not afterward.*

ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιτηδευμάτων μόλις τελειωθεῖσιν ὁ καρπὸς ἔρχεται, ἐπὶ δὲ φιλοσοφίας συντρέχει τῇ γνώσει τὸ τερπνόν· οὐ γὰρ μετὰ μάθησιν **ἀπόλαυσις**, ἀλλὰ ἅμα μάθησις καὶ **ἀπόλαυσις**.

One is literally here taking delight in the fruit of the love and practice of wisdom.

All these connotations will be important as we explore what Epicurus is telling Menoikeus in verses 131 and 132.

In looking at κειμένας (from κείμαι), we see a variety of connotations:

1. to lie, lie outstretched
2. to lie asleep, repose, lie idle, lie still
3. to lie sick or wounded, lie in misery
4. to lie dead
5. to lie neglected, uncared for, unburied
6. (of wrestlers) to have a fall

In light of these, some in the *EpicureanFriends* discussion suggested the meaning of τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας to be something akin to “those who lie (in bed) in enjoyment,” i.e., “we’re talking about the kinds of things a person might enjoy while lying in bed.” They offered that sex is something one enjoys in bed, but I’m personally not persuaded on that point upon further reflection. The lying implied by κείμαι appears to be more stationary or idle instead of, let’s say, *actively engaging* in an activity while lying down, especially since one connotation is lying sick or dead. It seems to me to mean stuck in one spot.

Some also took the second τὰς as referring back to τὰς ἡδονὰς with the ἡδονὰς understood, so taken together “the pleasures of profligates or those [pleasures] lying in ἀπολαύσει.” That could very well be, but we could still see τὰς κειμένας as “those (people) κειμένας-ing.” I am persuaded that the τὰς κειμένας are “those (people) ‘lying’ in ἀπολαύσει” to contrast them with the ἄσωτος referenced in the same sentence.

The exact phrase τὰς κειμένας is cited in LSJ as being used by Demosthenes and Diogenes Laertius and translated into English as:

1. (those) deposited (Demosthenes, Against Olympiodorus 48:17)
2. (those) deposited (Diogenes Laertius 5:3:64; “*Arcesilaus shall also cancel the agreement made by Strato with Olympichus and Ameinias and **deposited** (τὰς κειμένας) with Philocrates the son of Tisamenus.*”)

I believe the key to understanding Epicurus's message to Menoikeus here in 131 and 132 is looking at the entire phrase **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας** in its context within the letter.

Breaking this section down, we can rearrange it as follows:

Who are those ignorant or opposed to the philosophy of Epicurus and to his definition of pleasure referred to here?

(1) those who are prodigal

(A) (are) those who are ignorant

(2) those deposited in delighting in sensual pleasures (or taking pleasure in the fruit of things or activities external to themselves)

(B) (are) those who don't agree with us

(C) (and) those who believe wrongly

Activities of those ignorant or opposed:

(i) endless strings of drinking parties and festivals

(ii) ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν (not translating for now...see below)

(iii) extravagant tables of fish and other things

I have come to believe that interpreting τὰς κειμένας in the sense of being *deposited*, being *idle*, lying *still*, lying dead, or, if you will, being *stuck* "in ἀπολαύσει" is of great importance to understanding Epicurus's intent here.

Furthermore, many translations just use "enjoyment" for ἀπολαύσει, but we know Epicurus taught that we are meant to enjoy life, to take pleasure in it. We should *enjoy* the fruits of the love and practice of wisdom. What is the nuance of ἀπολαύσει that he can tell Menoikeus that he doesn't mean "taking enjoyment" in things when he says pleasure? We have to remember that Epicurus uses ἀπολαύσει in both positive and negative ways in his writings and that we need to parse them carefully.

I am now of the opinion that **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας** should be interpreted as "those who are *stuck* in enjoying (only) those things which provide enjoyment from outside themselves." To me, this is a direct reference to the "incorrect" beliefs of the Cyrenaics and others in relation to pleasure. And, yes, the reader is correct that I'm referring to the kinetic and katastematic pleasures that Epicurus mentions. I realize this will be considered controversial by some, but I believe this best explains Epicurus's being able to use **ἀπολαύσει** in both positive and negative senses.

Epicurus is on record for including *both* kinetic and katastematic pleasures within his definition of "pleasure." I have now come to understand kinetic pleasures as those arising from factors and circumstances and that "stand out" from our "background" state of katastematic pleasures within ourselves (such as tranquility, pleasurable memories, etc.). A metaphor discussed at the *EpicureanFriends* forum for this was that katastematic pleasures are the calm ocean while kinetic pleasures are the waves which

we can surf. We can enjoy both floating on the calm water as well as the catching the waves and "shooting the curl." While Epicurus conveys (along with Metrodorus and Philodemus) that we can be more confident in katastematic pleasures, we continue to "delight" in kinetic pleasures when they are available. It is the exclusivity of "getting stuck in" only seeing kinetic pleasures as pleasure that Epicurus is objecting to here with **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας.**

**131i. ὥς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν,**

- ὥς "as, like" (introducing a simile as to the pleasures of the ἀσωτος are like...)
- τινες ἀγνοοῦντες "not knowing something, being ignorant of something; going wrong, making a false step"
- ὁμολογοῦντες "agreeing with, saying the same thing as"
- κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι "take or understand in a bad or evil sense"
- νομίζουσιν "(they) believe"
- "like those who are ignorant or those who don't agree with us or those who believe wrongly."
  - This seems to me to be a shot directly at the Platonists, Cyrenaics, Peripatetics, and others who tried to slander and mischaracterize the students of the Garden.

**131j. ἀλλὰ τὸ μήτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μήτε ταραττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν·**

- σῶμα "one's body; one's material life in the physical world"
- ταραττεσθαι < τᾶρᾶττω, Attic form of ταρασσω (tarassō) "trouble, disturb, upset"
  - ταραττεσθαι (Attic form) < ταραττεσθαι (middle/passive infinitive)
  - This word is connected to ἀταραξία (ataraxia) < ἀ- (a- "not") + ταρασσω (tarássō "trouble, disturb") + -ῖα
- "but that which neither pains the body (σῶμα sōma) nor troubles the mind (ψυχὴν psykhēn)."

Look at that! We're at the end of another verse! We're covered a lot of ground, so it's time to pull it all together.

A simple meal of hearty, wholesome bread and spring water delivers the most extreme pleasure whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst; and, when extravagant experiences do come up every once in a while, they are experienced more intensely by us, and we are better able to fearlessly face the vicissitudes of fortune.

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say the pleasure of those who are prodigal and those stuck in taking delight (only) in kinetic pleasures like those who are ignorant, those who don't agree with us, or those who

believe wrongly; but we mean that which neither pains the body nor troubles the mind.

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