

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

Post by "Cassius" of October 26, 2024 at 2:56 PM

Also: While I do think it is most clear to a modern reader to add in the "only," if we put the issue in a clearly philosophical context, such as the heap analogy, then the "only" isn't strictly necessary.

A heap "is not" any of the individual grains of sand that compose it. That can also be said as "A heap is not only the individual grains of sand that compose it, the heap is the combination of the grains of sand." I think that's the Epicurean position on the sorites question, and the reason for him saying that he would not know the good **without** the sensual pleasures. If someone understands that then the discussion we're having right now never comes up. But that's the problem, people are not thinking in terms of the sorites/heap issue. They are thinking generally from their preconceived Platonic/Humanist perspective that sensual issues are "bad," so they jump to conclude that that is what Epicurus is saying.

So I would say that it's not strictly necessary to say "Pleasure is not *only* the pleasures of sensuality and of the profligate...." because if you realize the the term "pleasure" is meant conceptually, then you automatically read into the sentence an understanding that the concept of pleasure is not identical with any individual pleasure -- you understand that as a matter of logic just like you understand that a heap is not the same as its parts. But very few ordinary people think that way, so they probably need the "only."

The real erroneous interpretation in my view is not that of adding in the "only," but in failing to see that the sentence structure makes clear that the blanket term "pleasure" is not *identical* with **any** particular pleasure. Once that is established then the meaning can be communicated in many ways. So I would say that the main error to be avoided would be any reading that separates "sensual pleasures" out of a list of "approved pleasures" as very many commentators today are doing. That interpretation sounds like "Pleasure does not include the pleasures of sensuality or the profligates," which I would maintain is clearly wrong.

Yes Epicurus was different from the Cyreniacs, but he was not different because he subtracted sensual pleasures from a list of approved pleasures, he was expanding the Cyreniac list of pleasures to include experiences that they did not consider to be pleasure.