

Episode 270 - Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 11:41 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

I still tend to think Epicurus was responding to Plato's [Philebus](#) in his discussion of limits, duration, and death. I'll have to review that dialogue.

Yes, that I think is the ultimate answer. "Limit" has multiple meanings and so does any variation of "greater." Unless you add something extra such as "in every respect" then it's going to be a very fair reading to acknowledge that what you're saying is "greater" is *not* greater "in every respect." What Epicurus is talking about is the limit of Pleasure, but pleasure has many aspects, of which one is time, and not all pleasures are equal in time or in many other respects.

And that's where you come back to what Epicurus said to Menoeceus that just as the wise man does not choose the most food, but the most pleasant food, the wise man does not choose the longest life, but the most pleasant.

That right there is a clear illustration. The food the wise man chooses is better to him, but not more in quantity, and the time the wise man chooses more pleasant for him, but not longer in time.

But the difference in quantity of food and length of time is not physically abolished by the choice of the wise man. The wise man is simply intentionally choosing to ignore the quantity difference and the time difference. because he has mentally chosen to recognize that the pleasantness is more important to him than the extra time or the extra quantity.

So that's why I think Long and Sedley are clearly correct: Epicurus would recognize that length of time is something that can definitely be desirable, but it is not the overriding factor. The overriding factor is what you choose to feel and recognize as the most pleasant for you. The mind can influence what it finds pleasurable even more than can the body.

So it is perfectly proper to say "infinite time contains no greater time than finite time" on the grounds that the "greater" you are talking about is what you deem to be "the most pleasant." What is "most pleasant" for you is something that you can choose to recognize as something that doesn't necessarily get better with significantly more time.

One example is standing on the tip of the mountaintop - the more time you spend there the less you're likely to want to stay.

So I would say too that this is why Epicurus is saying several times that you get to this recognition through "reason" and through "the mind." The body itself is not able to figure this out, nor is someone who doesn't have the benefit of Epicurean philosophy and who thinks that unlimited time will necessarily allow him to reach greater heights of pleasure.

To repeat what I agreed with Don earlier, this view of duration totally gets rid of fear, and that's very important. But not everyone is as subject to "fear" as are others, and it is perfectly legitimate and in fact natural when you are young to take the position - "I am not afraid of death or anything else -- I simply want to understand how to spend my life."

And Epicurus has the answer that "time" or "duration" is not at all the overriding factor in making your choices. You can in fact live like "a god among men" not only because you not afraid of death, but because you are confident that you are able to obtain whatever is the greatest pleasure for you in the time that you have.