

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

Post by "Cassius" of March 9, 2025 at 4:21 PM

Dropping a couple of things here for future thought:

1. In Episode 271, looking at Tusculum Disputations Part 1 at 34, we will come across an offhand reference to Epicurus disagreeing with Democritus. Apparently Democritus held that the soul may continue to exist for at least some period of time after death. Cicero points out that the Epicureans made clear their disagreement with Democritus on that point.
2. Democritus apparently tended to think that the only thing "real" is the atoms and void, and that everything else exists only by convention.
3. If we apply point (2) to the soul, then would we be concerned that Democritus held that the soul is not "real" and that the soul continues to exist in atomic form just like the decomposing corpse?
4. It is apparently clear that Epicurus wanted to escape from the skepticism that Democritus' views entailed for important ethical questions.
5. Dropping back to line 449 of Book one of Lucretius (which is presumably a condensation of Epicurus' On Nature), we have the discussion of properties and qualities of atoms and void. Too much to quote here in full, but in summary it looks like the point is that not only the atoms and void are real but also the properties and qualities of things are real. Epicurean theory seems to end up referring to these things as what we call "emergent qualities" and we consider them to be no less real than the atoms:. Quick summary:
 1. [1:449] Everything that we can name to exist has attributes that we consider to be properties or events/accidents of that thing. A property is something that cannot be separated from the thing without the thing being destroyed, such as you cannot separate weight from rocks, or heat from fire, or moisture from water, or touch from bodies, or emptiness from void. On the other hand, events/accident can be separated from a thing without destroying it, such as slavery, poverty, riches, freedom, war, and peace can be separated from people without destroying the person himself.
 2. [1:464] Time is an example of an event that does not exist by itself, but from our feelings about the motion or stillness of things. For example, consider the Trojan War, which does not exist in itself, but as an event of things that occurred in the past. The people involved in that war are long dead, and the Trojan War is but an event of the people and things that were involved at the time.
 3. [1:483] Bodies are therefore not only the atoms that compose them, but thing things that are created when the atoms combine. In the world around us everything

is porous, but by reasoning we will see that the atoms themselves are not porous, and from them everything we see is created.

6. Diogenes of Oinoanda emphasis that happiness is a life of pleasure: in Fragment 32: "**Fr. 32** ... [the latter] being as malicious as the former. I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now. If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. **But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?»**, I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, **that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues**, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end. Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.
7. Torquatus in On Ends appears to equate a life of happiness with a life of pleasure
 1. Book 1 Line 32: [32] X. But that I may make plain to you the source of all the mistakes made by those who inveigh against pleasure and eulogize pain, I will unfold the whole system and will set before you the very language held by that great discoverer of truth and that master-builder, if I may style him so, of the life of happiness.
 2. [54] But if the encomium passed even on the virtues themselves, over which the eloquence of all other philosophers especially runs riot, can find no vent unless it be referred to pleasure, and pleasure is the only thing which invites us to the pursuit of itself, and attracts us by reason of its own nature, then there can be no doubt that of all things good it is the supreme and ultimate good, and that a life of happiness means nothing else but a life attended by pleasure.
8. Switching contexts again, most of us agree that Epicurus was experiencing happiness, even on his last day, when he was wracked with pain of kidney disease.
9. Going back to Lucretius, quoting this time from Bailey: [449] For all things that have a name, you will find either properties linked to these two things or you will see them to be their accidents. That is a property which in no case can be sundered or separated without the fatal disunion of the thing, as is weight to rocks, heat to fire, moisture to water, touch to all bodies, intangibility to the void. On the other hand, slavery, poverty, riches, liberty, war, concord, and other things by whose coming and going the nature of things abides untouched, these we are used, as is natural, to call accidents. Even so time exists not by itself, but from actual things comes a feeling, what was brought to a close in time past, then what is present now, and further what is going to be hereafter. And it must be avowed that no man feels time by itself apart from the motion or quiet rest of things.

Based on the above:

1. To what extent would it be appropriate to conclude that Epicurus is considering "happiness" to be an "emergent quality" - an event - of a life of discrete pleasures? In this case I would see happiness as an emergent property of the "event" kind rather than the

permanent kind because happiness is not destroyed by the existence of some degree of pain, even by a tremendous amount of pain such as when under torture.

2. The main reason I ask this is to consider whether Epicurus viewed "happiness" as a real thing, distinct from pleasure, by means of being an emergent quality that could not exist without the underlying discrete pleasures (accompanied by pains). Is this comparable to how the human body would not exist but for the existence of the underlying atoms and void? Given Epicurus' intent to correct the errors of Democritus leading toward skepticism and determinism, Epicurus would have been able to employ the relationship between atoms and bodies in physics to describe in ethics how the concept of happiness arises from the experience of discrete pleasures.
3. Would these points be helpful in describing the relationship between happiness and pleasure?