

Episode 298 - TD26 - Facts And Feelings In Epicurean Philosophy - Part 1"

Post by "Cassius" of September 13, 2025 at 11:03 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

It is deadly to Epicurean philosophy to interpret "absence of pain" as inactivity.

Which in my mind means that if you're standing on a stage and you say "absence of pain is pleasure" or "absence of pain is the highest pleasure," then you're saying the equivalent of *the sun is the size it appears to be,* or "*for gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision.*"

To a person of ordinary education and intelligence, none of those statements make sense on their face without explanation. Ordinary people will think you are being absurd. And if you aren't willing and don't proceed to immediately provide that explanation in very clear terms, then those ordinary people will conclude that you are a provocateur and laugh or pull you off the stage. And in general you'll deserve that treatment.

Of course if you intend to insult your audience, then saying those underlined statements without explanation will certainly do the trick. But in that case one day you're likely to find yourself drinking Hemlock with Socrates. And most people will think that you won't deserve a lot of sympathy.

So taking the modern position that the term "absence of pain" speaks for itself is absurd. Cicero saw that it doesn't speak for itself. Plutarch saw that it doesn't speak for itself. And the educated Greeks of Epicurus' time weren't stupid either, and they would have demanded and gotten an explanation from Epicurus. But I don't think they would have had to demand anything, because what they had, and what we don't have, was all of Epicurus' *other* works beyond the letter to Menoeceus, and from which Cicero and Plutarch are quoting. And these quotations combined with common sense point to the conclusion that when Epicurus was referring to "absence of pain," what he meant was that *the reason you're not in pain* is that *you're completely engaged in mental and physical activities that are pleasurable.*

[Quote from Cicero - In Defense of Publius Sestius 10:23 \(Perseus Link\)](#)

He added that these same men were quite right in saying that the wise do everything for their own interests; that no sane man should engage in public affairs; that nothing was preferable to a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures.

(nihil esse praestabilius otiosa vita, plena et conferta voluptatibus.)