

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

Post by "Don" of September 15, 2025 at 10:52 PM

I thought it might be interesting to listeners to see what other quotes exist from Epicurus' "On the End-Goal" (Περὶ Τέλους): <https://www.attalus.org/translate/epicurus.html#k45>

As is also my wont, I want to *briefly* address the "pleasures of the profligate" mentioned in this episode. If you want to go even more into the weeds on this, most of this below is copied from my translation and commentary of the *Letter to Menoikeus*.

The specific section of the *Letter* is:

Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν¹, οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν, ὡς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μήτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μήτε ταράττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν·

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the goal (τέλος)," we do not say the pleasure of those who are prodigal and those stuck in delighting in pleasures arising from circumstances outside of ourselves 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. (*My translation*)

A. τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς = "the pleasures of those who are past recovery with no hope of safety!" My discovery, several years ago now, that ἀσώτων (genitive of ἄσωτος (asōtos)) is the exact same word used in the [Parable of the Prodigal Son](#) in the *New Testament* gave this line a new resonance. I grew up on stories of the wanton ways of the prodigal son:

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living (ζῶν ἀσώτως). After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."

Hmm, pigs? Coincidence?? In any case, I digress...

ἄσωτος = having no hope of safety, in desperate case; to be past recovery; in moral sense, abandoned, profligate. The Latin synonym given is *perditus* "squander, dissipate, waste, throw away, lost" (from which we get "perdition.")

So, when Epicurus says "we don't say" he's talking about that kind of behavior that leads to loss, desperation, and to be beyond recovery.

B. τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένους = "those stuck in delighting in pleasures arising from circumstances outside of ourselves" I'll admit my translation could be controversial.

There was [an extensive discussion on ἀπολαύσει on the forum a couple years ago](#).

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 with the additional meaning of "advantage got from 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.

To cut to the chase:

I am now of the opinion that **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένους** 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. 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 of 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.**

1 Footnote on ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν. When Epicurus writes this phrase, he's not just saying "Pleasure is the end-goal." It's more emphatic than that. ὑπάρχειν expresses a more integral, intimate relationship. It's more than just "is." It's more like "The telos/the end-goal has its being from the very beginning of the universe in pleasure." Granted, that may be pushing it to limit, but that gets closer than just "is" from how I can interpret it.

See also <https://philarchive.org/rec/GHOWDU>

[Preexistence before Socrates – Research Bulletin](#)