

Episode 335 - EATAQ 17 - Epicurean Analysis Of Stoic Claims About Notions And Memory

Post by "Cassius" of May 28, 2026 at 2:07 PM

Cicero's On Ends does not contain nearly as much information about the Stoic view of Kataleptic impressions (that we can use to compare against Epicurus' views) as does his "Academic Questions," but it does contain this:

[Quote from Cato speaking for the Stoics in Cicero's On Ends Book III](#)

5 He began: "It is the view of those whose system I adopt, that immediately upon birth (for that is the proper point to start from) a living creature feels an attachment for itself, and an impulse to preserve itself and to feel affection for its own constitution and for those things which tend to preserve that constitution; while on the other hand it conceives an antipathy to destruction and to those things which appear to threaten destruction. In proof of this opinion they urge that infants desire things conducive to their health and reject things that are the opposite before they have ever felt pleasure or pain; this would not be the case, unless they felt an affection for their own constitution and were afraid of destruction. But it would be impossible that they should feel desire at all unless they possessed self-consciousness, and consequently felt affection for themselves. This leads to the conclusion that it is love of self which supplies the primary p235 impulse to action. 17 Pleasure on the contrary, according to most Stoics, is not to be reckoned among the primary objects of natural impulse; and I very strongly agree with them, for fear lest many immoral consequences would follow if we held that nature has placed pleasure among the earliest objects of desire. But the fact of our affection for the objects first adopted at nature's prompting seems to require no further proof than this, that there is no one who, given the choice, would not prefer to have all the parts of his body sound and whole, rather than maimed or distorted although equally serviceable.

"Again, acts of cognition (which we may term comprehensions or perceptions, or, if these words are distasteful or obscure, katalēpseis), — these we consider meet to be adopted for their own sake, because they possess an element that so to speak embraces and contains the truth. This can be seen in the case of children, whom we may observe to take pleasure in finding something out for themselves by the use of reason, even though they gain nothing by it. 18 The sciences also, we consider, are things to be chosen for their own sake, partly because there is in them something worthy of choice, partly because they consist of acts of cognition and contain an element of fact established by methodical reasoning. The mental assent to what is

false, as the Stoics believe, is more repugnant to us than all the other things that are contrary to nature.

"(Again,⁵ of the members or parts of the body, some appear to have been bestowed on us by nature for the sake of their use, for example the hands, legs, feet, and internal organs, as to the degree of whose utility even physicians are not agreed; p237 while others serve no useful purpose, but appear to be intended for ornament: for instance the peacock's tail, the plumage of the dove with its shifting colours, and the breasts and beard of the male human being.) 19 All this is perhaps somewhat baldly expressed; for it deals with what may be called the primary elements of nature, to which any embellishment of style can scarcely be applied, nor am I for my part concerned to attempt it. On the other hand, when one is treating of more majestic topics the style instinctively rises with the subject, and the brilliance of the language increases with the dignity of the theme." "True," I rejoined; "but to my mind, any clear statement of an important topic possesses excellence of style. It would be childish to desire an ornate style in subjects of the kind with which you are dealing. A man of sense and education will be content to be able to express his meaning plainly and clearly."