

# Are You Epicurean Or Hieronymian?

**Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2019 at 2:08 PM**

According to Doctrine 3, Epicurus held that the limit of quantity of pleasure is the absence of pain. This is a function of the truism / premise that there are only two feelings - pleasure and pain - which means that in quantity, the measurement that describes the "absence" of the one is the same measurement as the "presence" of the other. But this observation is limited to quantity - it has nothing to do with the quality or the detail of the type of pleasure (or pain) that is being experienced at a particular moment.

Nevertheless, there is at loose in philosophical communities today the idea that Epicurus taught that pleasure is exactly equal - is defined as - "absence of pain," and so many are motivated to try to reconcile the inconsistencies in the texts by holding that Epicurus meant "tranquility" and that "tranquility itself" is the goal of life. What they would really say, if they followed their conclusion to the end, is that "tranquility is the highest pleasure" -- but you rarely see that formulation, as it is so obviously and counter intuitively incorrect.

The record of how all this discussion got started is out there if people would look. [Much of the story begins with Plato and Philebus](#), but Epicurus was not the only one to grapple with the issue. One philosopher -Heronymous of Rhodes - explicitly adopted the modern "absence of pain" position - and everyone at the time knew the difference. Heronymous of Rhodes is forgotten today, but Epicurus is tagged with his incorrect viewpoint. Beware!

# The Upside Down World of Considering “Absence of Pain” To Be The Goal Of Life



If You Maintain That “Absence of Pain” Is the  
Goal of Life, rather than Pleasure, You’re Not  
An Epicurean, You’re A

## Hieronymian!

The effort to identify Clement’s principal sources has not encountered much success. One thing worth noting, however, is that like Cicero, his account of the Cyrenaic end appears to go back to Carneades. This emerges from the fact that *Strom.* 2.21.127.1–128.2, which includes two pieces of information about the Cyrenaics (= SSR 4a.198–99), also includes a series of philosophers and ends corresponding to Cicero’s reports of the Carneadean articulation: Epicurus and Aristippus propose the simple end of pleasure, Hieronimus the simple end of absence of pain, Dinomachus and Callipho the complex end of virtue and pleasure, Diodorus the complex end of virtue and absence of pain (compare Cic. *Fin.* 5.20–21, *Tusc.* 5.84–85, *Luc.* 131). Moreover, the end attributed to Callipho

For «we know»<sup>12</sup> that both the Cyrenaics and Epicurus belong to those who make pleasure their starting point, because these say expressly that living pleasantly is the end, and that only pleasure is an endlike good. But

Kurt Lampe, The Birth of Hedonism, p. 201, citing  
Cicero and Clement of Alexandria.

Cicero - Academic Questions:

To say nothing, then, of all these opinions, let us now examine those others which have been long and vigorously maintained. Some have accounted pleasure the chief good; the chief of whom was Aristippus, who had been a pupil of Socrates, and from whom the Cyrenaic school spring. After him came Epicurus, whose school is now better known, though he does not exactly agree with the Cyrenaics about pleasure itself. But Callipho thought that pleasure and honour combined made up the chief good. **Hieronymus** placed it in being free from all annoyance; Diodorus in this state when combined with honour. Both these last men were Peripatetics. To live honourably, enjoying those things which nature makes most dear to man, was the definition both of the Old Academy, (as as we may learn from the writings of Polemo, who is highly approved of by Antiochus,) and of Aristotle, and it is the one to which his friends appear now to come nearest. Carneades also introduced a definition, (not because he approved of it himself, but for the sake of opposition to the Stoics,) that the chief good is to enjoy these

Cicero - On Ends:

that for the sake of learning rather than of finding fault with either you or Epicurus. I too, said he, should be more desirous to learn of you, if you can impart anything worth learning, than to find fault with you.

Well, then, said I, you are aware of what Hieronymus<sup>1</sup> of Rhodes says is the chief good, to which he thinks that everything ought to be referred? I know, said he, that he thinks that the great end is freedom from pain. Well, what are his sentiments respecting pleasure? He affirms, he replied, that it is not to be sought for its own sake; for he thinks that rejoicing is one thing, and being free from pain another. And indeed, continued he, he is in this point greatly mistaken, for, as I proved a little while ago, the end of increasing pleasure is the removal of all pain. I will examine, said I, presently, what the meaning of the expression, freedom from pain, is; but unless you are very obstinate, you must admit that pleasure is a perfectly distinct thing from mere freedom from pain. You will, however, said he, find that I am obstinate in this; for nothing can be more real than the identity between the two. Is there, now, said I, any pleasure felt by a thirsty man in drinking? Who can deny it? said he. Is it, asked I, the same pleasure that he feels after his thirst is extinguished? It is, replied he, another kind of pleasure; for the state of extinguished thirst has in it a certain stability of pleasure, but the pleasure of extinguishing it is pleasure in motion. Why, then, said I, do you call things so unlike one another by the same name? Do not

I will give Hieronymus credit for one thing: he is consistent in seeing that holding up "absence of pain" as the goal means to depreciate "pleasure" as the goal of life. Whether they admit it or not, this is the natural road which proponents of "absence of pain" will follow - they end up being opponents of "pleasure" as ordinarily understood.

Next - again from Cicero, On Ends:

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Cicero the lying litigator at work again! Cicero KNOWS that Epicurus did not make the mistake of calling "absence of pain" the goal of life, as Hieronymus did, but because some are so obtuse as to think "absence of pain" makes sense (Hieronymus was such a one!) Cicero is able to use the argument to great effect - or so he thinks! But once we see that the goal is PLEASURE, rather than absence of pain, Cicero's argument falls to the ground:

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