

On Ends Torquatus Section Discussion

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 25, 2023 at 9:20 AM

Here is a thread for further discussion on the Torquatus section of Cicero's "On Ends". Back in the fall of 2021 the Lucretius Today Podcast covered this text. [You can find the text here](#), and the [first of that podcast here \(Episode 93\)](#).

Back at that time I was still new to the forum, and so wasn't able to properly absorb it. Since then I have listened to the audio recording several times, as [read by Joshua, which you can find here](#), and that significantly improved my understanding.

As I have studied Epicurean philosophy further, I have found that this narrative has its usefulness, and yet there are parts that need to be "unpacked" with care.

Here in this thread I want to present the highlights, and also point out (with a word of caution) parts which "muddy the waters". So I will post more soon.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 25, 2023 at 11:24 AM

Highlight 1: Sensation is the method of perception and evaluation of both pleasure and pain. It comes to us out of our natural constitution.

[30] Every creature, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and delights therein as in its supreme good, while it recoils from pain as its supreme evil, and banishes that, so far as it can, from its own presence, and this it does while still uncorrupted, and while nature herself prompts unbiased and unaffected decisions. So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak; the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts. Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what

facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?

I am coming at this from a different focus than Cicero, and I want to highlight those sections which shed light onto the Epicurean worldview. I may come back later to the discussion on "the good", which we find in the text's previous paragraph. (In section 29 it says: The problem before us then is, what is the climax and standard of things good, and this in the opinion of all philosophers must needs be such that we are bound to test all things by it, but the standard itself by nothing. Epicurus places this standard in pleasure, which he lays down to be the supreme good, while pain is the supreme evil; and he founds his proof of this on the following considerations). As this line of thinking is coming from a different philosophical school (Platonic), and which the Epicureans had to deal with this line of questioning from the opposing philosophy. It is a very different focus than the recognition of the mortality of life and the desire to live in such a way as to enjoy the experience of this life we find ourselves in.

This highlighted paragraph (section 30) sheds light on both the sensations and the feelings -- and which together with anticipations (prolepsis - the faculty of pattern recognition) are the three legs of the canon of truth. The sensations are the primary method in which we gather information about the outside (material) world. And we see that the feelings are two: pleasure and pain.

It worth contemplating both the sensations and the feelings. How do we sense things? How to we come to label things? Regarding sensations and feelings can we notice that they fall into only two categories -- "okay" and "not okay"? And there could be further contemplations (more on this soon).

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 25, 2023 at 2:00 PM

Highlight 2: We desire pleasure and move away from pain, but we must consider the future results and future advantages -- and so there are times we will choose to endure pain for the sake of future pleasure, or choose to postpone current pleasures so that the future pleasures will be greater.

From section 32:

Surely no one recoils from or dislikes or avoids pleasure in itself because it is pleasure, but because great pains come upon those who do not know how to follow pleasure rationally. Nor again is there any one who loves or pursues or wishes to win pain on its own account, merely because it is pain, but rather because circumstances sometimes occur which compel him to seek some great pleasure at the cost of exertion and pain. To come down to petty details, who

among us ever undertakes any toilsome bodily exercise, except in the hope of gaining some advantage from it? Who again would have any right to reproach either a man who desires to be surrounded by pleasure unaccompanied by any annoyance, or another man who shrinks from any pain which is not productive of pleasure?

From section 33:

For at our seasons of ease, when we have untrammelled freedom of choice, and when nothing debars us from the power of following the course that pleases us best, then pleasure is wholly a matter for our selection and pain for our rejection. On certain occasions however either through the inevitable call of duty or through stress of circumstances, it will often come to pass that we must put pleasures from us and must make no protest against annoyance. So in such cases the principle of selection adopted by the wise man is that he should either by refusing certain pleasures attain to other and greater pleasures or by enduring pains should ward off pains still more severe.

Excerpt from section 36: "...pleasures are neglected for the purpose of obtaining pleasures still greater, or pains are incurred for the sake of escaping still greater pains."

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 25, 2023 at 2:33 PM

Highlight 3: The best pleasures can occur with the simultaneous removal of pain, and this an important aspect of pleasure often overlooked because most people focus on the simple pleasures of sensual enjoyment (taste, smell, sight, sound, touch).

From section 37:

For the pleasure which we pursue is not that alone which excites the natural constitution itself by a kind of sweetness, and of which the sensual enjoyment is attended by a kind of agreeableness, but we look upon the greatest pleasure as that which is enjoyed when all pain is removed. Now inasmuch as whenever we are released from pain, we rejoice in the mere emancipation and freedom from all annoyance, and everything whereat we rejoice is equivalent to pleasure, just as everything whereat we are troubled is equivalent to pain, therefore the complete release from pain is rightly termed pleasure. For just as the mere removal of annoyance brings with it the realization of pleasure, whenever hunger and thirst have been banished by food and drink, so pain is removed. For just as the mere removal of annoyance brings with it the realization of pleasure, whenever hunger and thirst have been banished by food and drink, so in every case the banishment of pain ensures its replacement by pleasure.

[38] Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension.

Consider for contemplation:

1) your experience between eating a warm, just-out-of-the-oven slice of your favorite kind of pizza when you are hungry vs. when you are not really hungry.

2) your experience of eating when you are hungry and eating just the right number of slices of pizza to feel no longer hungry (and comfortably full) vs. eating several slices too many (eating past the point of fullness and then feeling the pain of your over-full belly).

3) the removal of your hunger by eating the right amount is more pleasurable than eating too much.