

Episode 176 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 28 - Chapter 12 - The New Hedonism 05

Post by "Cassius" of May 26, 2023 at 4:36 PM

Welcome to Episode 176 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics. We are now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy." This week we continue our discussion of Chapter 12, entitled "The New Hedonism."

This week;

The Root of All Good

Pleasure Can Be Continuous

Next Week:

Continuous Pain Impossible

The Relation of Pleasure To Virtue

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/54065241>

Post by "Cassius" of May 27, 2023 at 8:41 PM

In our discussions we spend most of our time talking about Torquatus' positive presentation of Epicurean ethics in Book One of "On Ends," but there is a lot of material also in Book Two.

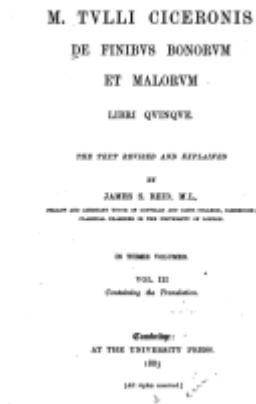
In this episode of the podcast DeWitt reminds us of the criticism that Cicero raised that we should not be calling a state of absence of pain as a positive pleasure. Cicero knew that it is important to Epicurean theory that we be able to do just that, so to be sure we are on top of

this issue here is some of the important material, this from the Reid translation of On Ends.

I have highlighted at the end of this passage Cicero's attempt to ridicule the idea that the host who pours a libation for a thirsty guest can be thought of as experiencing just as much pleasure as the guest who drinks it.

Cicero seeks to make that look ridiculous, but this is true if we think logically of all types of pleasure as pleasure (this is the "Unity of Pleasure" that DeWitt is talking about). In this example each person is experiencing the positive pleasure of being alive without pain, and even if they are experiencing different types of pleasure at the particular moment, if they are experiencing no pain then they are experiencing the height of pleasure open to them (as pleasure is filling their experience so they are in no pain.)

(Note - the following quotes are from Reid)



15 V. Do you think then that I sufficiently grasp the force of expressions, or am I even at my age to be taught to speak either Greek or Latin? And, putting that aside, even granting that I do not clearly comprehend what Epicurus means, though I have, I believe, a clear knowledge of Greek, look to it that there be not some fault in him who uses such language that he is not understood. This happens in two ways without reproof, when it is done intentionally, as by Heraclitus, *who is styled by the surname σκοτεινός, because he talked about physical science in very dark language*, or when the darkness of the subject-matter, not the language, makes the style difficult to understand, as is the case with the *Timæus* of Plato. But Epicurus, I imagine, neither lacks the desire to express himself lucidly and plainly, if he can, nor deals with dark subjects, as do the physical writers, nor with technical matters, like the mathematicians, but speaks on a doctrine which is perspicuous and easy and which has already spread itself abroad. Still you do not declare that we fail to understand what pleasure is, but what he says of it, whence it results not that we fail to under-

16 a fashion of his own and gives no heed to ours. If indeed his statement is identical with that of Hieronymus, who pronounces that supreme good consists in a life apart from all annoyance, why does he prefer to talk of pleasure rather than of freedom from pain, as Hieronymus does, who well understands what he is describing? And if he thinks he must add to this the pleasure which depends on agitation (for he thus speaks of this sweet kind of pleasure, as consisting in agitation, and of the other, felt by a man free from pain, as consisting in steadiness) why does he fight? He cannot bring it about that any man who knows himself, I mean who has thoroughly examined his own constitution and his own senses, should think that freedom from pain is one and the same thing with pleasure. It is as good as doing violence to the senses, Torquatus, to uproot from our minds those notions of words which are ingrained in us. Why, who can fail to see that there are, in the nature of things, these three states, one when we are in pleasure, another when we are in pain, the third, the state in which I am now, and I suppose you

too, when we are neither in pain nor in pleasure; thus he who is feasting is in pleasure, while he who is on the rack is in pain. But do you not see that between these extremes lies a great crowd of men who feel neither delight nor sorrow?' 'Not at all,' said he; 'and I affirm that all who are without pain are in pleasure and that the fullest possible.' 'Therefore he who, not thirsty himself, mixes mead for another, and he who, being thirsty, drinks the mead, are in just the same state of pleasure?'

VI. Then he replied: 'Make an end of questioning if you please; and I said at the outset that I preferred to have it so, foreseeing just what has come about, I mean logical quibbles.' 'Then,' said I, 'would you rather that we debated in rhetorical than in logical style?' 'You speak,' he answered, 'as though continuous speech belonged to rhetoricians only and not to philosophers also.' 'This,' I replied, 'is what Zeno the Stoic says; that all power of speech has two divisions (so it seemed to Aristotle before him); rhetoric he declared to resemble the open hand, logic the closed fist, because rhetoricians speak in a

DeWitt sees this "unity of pleasure" perspective as the intent of the point to be taken from [PD09](#):

[PD09](#). If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted, and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another.

And I think he is probably correct.

Post by "Don" of May 28, 2023 at 11:28 AM

On p. 240, DeWitt quotes "What, in a word, is to be said of a philosophy that begins by regarding pleasure as the only positive good and ends by emptying pleasure of all positive content?"

This is from Paul Elmer More's *Hellenistic Philosophies* (Princeton University Press, 1923). [You can read the full context of More's quote at the Internet Archive \(click this link\).](#)

Post by “Cassius” of May 28, 2023 at 1:54 PM

Thank you Don for tracking that down. I have never previously taken the time to track it down. Having now seen it I think it is worth us considering the full attack:

Quote

"The difficulty that confronts us when we try to understand Epicurus is the extraordinary paradox of his logic. What, in a word, is to be said of a philosophy that begins with regarding pleasure as the only positive good and ends by emptying pleasure of all positive content ? There is no possibility, I think, of really reconciling this blunt contradiction, which was sufficiently obvious to the enemies of Epicurus in antiquity, but it is possible, with the aid of Plutarch's shrewd analysis, to follow him step by step from his premises to his conclusions, and so to discover the source of his entanglement.

Epicurus began with the materialistic and monistic theses which had allured Aristippus, and which, mingled in varying proportions from the teaching of Heraclitus and Protagoras and Democritus, had come to be the prevailing belief of the Greek people; they were, indeed, no more than the essence refined out of the voluble lecturing and debating of the so-called sophists against whom Socrates and Plato had waged a relentless but unsuccessful warfare. This visible palpable world of bodies is the only reality, and the only thing which to man, in such a world, has any certain value is his own immediate physical sensations. Pleasure we feel and pain we feel, in their various degrees and complications; and we know that all men welcome pleasure and shrink from pain by a necessity of nature. Pleasure, in fact, is simply a name for the sensation which we do welcome, and pain for the sensation from which we do shrink. The example of infants and animals is before us to nullify any attempt to argue away this primary distinction.

These are the premises of Epicurus, as they had been of Aristippus, and to these he will cling through thick and thin, whatever their consequences may be and however they may entangle him in self-contradictions. He seems even to have gone out of his way at times to find the grossest terms to express the doctrine, whether his motive was to shock the Philistines of morality or to fortify himself and his friends in their positive belief. The avowed programme of the school was "not to save the Greeks, but to indulge the belly to the limit of safety with meat and drink"; and in a letter to a friend Epicurus says : "I invite you to continuous pleasures, not to virtues that unsettle the mind with vain and empty hopes of fruition."

The programme is simple enough in all conscience, and might satisfy the most cynical votary of the flesh, but, desiring like his predecessor to be a voluptuary, Epicurus was driven despite himself to be a philosopher, even more a philosopher than the Cyrenaic, whether his wisdom came from deeper reflection or greater timidity. His experience might be described as the opposite of that of Johnson's humble acquaintance who had been trying all his life to attain philosophy but failed because cheerfulness would break in.

Aristippus could make a boast of his "Habeo, non habeor" but, however he might twist about, his dependence on the fleeting sensation of the moment left him at last a prey to the hazards of circumstance. Clearly the hedonist who was enough of a philosopher to aim at liberty and security must embrace a wider view of life than the Cyrenaic; and so the first step of Epicurus was to take happiness, conceived as a continuous state of pleasure, rather than particular pleasures, for the goal. This is the initial, and perhaps the most fundamental, difference between the strictly Epicurean and the Cyrenaic brand of hedonism.

But how, taking individual pleasures still in the grossly physical sense, was a man to assure himself of their consummation in happiness? It was well to make a god of the belly and, in the Epicurean language, of any other passage of the body that admitted pleasure and not pain, but, as soon as he began to reflect, the philosopher was confronted by the ugly fact that the entrances of pain are more numerous than those of pleasure, and that the paroxysms of pain may surpass in intensity any conceivable pleasure. He saw that there was something ephemeral and insecure in the very nature of pleasure, whereas pain had terrible rights over the flesh, and could dispute her domain with a vigour far beyond the power of her antagonist. Evidently, in a world so constituted, the aim of the philosopher will be lowered from a bold search for sensations to the humbler task of attaining some measure of security against forces he cannot control; and so, I think, we shall interpret the curious phenomenon that the greatest of all hedonists was driven to a purely defensive attitude towards life.

On the one hand he knew, as Plato had shown, that the recovery from disease and the relief from anguish do bring a sense of active well-being, and hence it was possible for him to define pleasure in negative terms without seeming to contradict flagrantly his grosser views about the belly and other bodily organs. Again, since positive pleasure and pain by some law of nature are so intimately bound together that the cessation of one is associated with access of the other, then, clearly, the only pleasure free of this unpleasant termination is that which is itself not positively induced but comes as the result of receding pain. For the content of happiness, therefore, the Epicurean will look to sensation of a negative sort: "The limit of pleasure is reached by the removal of all that gives pain," and "Pleasure in the flesh admits no increase, when once the pain of want is removed; it can only be variegated."

But the philosopher cannot stop here. 'Such a state of release, though in itself it may not be subject to the laws of alternative pleasure and pain, is yet open to interruption from the hazards of life. And so Epicurus, in his pursuit of happiness, is carried a step further. Not on the present possession of pleasure, whether positive or negative, will he depend for security of happiness, but on the power of memory. Here, at least, we appear to be free and safe, for memory is our own. Nothing can deprive us of that recollected joy, "which is the bliss of solitude" ; even what was distressful at the time may often, by some alchemy of the mind, be transmuted into a happy reminiscence:

"Things which offend when present, and affright,

In memory, well painted, move delight"

The true hedonism, then, will be a creation in the mind from material furnished it by the body. Plutarch describes the procedure of Epicurus thus, and exposes also its inadequacy:

Seeing that the field of joy in our poor bodies cannot be smooth and equal, but harsh and broken and mingled with much that is contrary, he transfers the exercise of philosophy from the flesh, as from a lean and barren soil, to the mind, in the hopes of enjoying there, as it were, large pastures and fair meadows of delight. Not in the body but in the soul is the true garden of the Epicurean to be cultivated. It might seem as if by the waving of a magic wand we had been translated from a materialistic hedonism to a region like that in which Socrates and Plato looked for unearthly happiness.

But in fact there is no such magic for the Epicurean. The source of the pleasures which compose our happiness is still physical, and only physical; the office of the soul, so-called, is merely to retain by an act of selective memory the scattered impressions of sensuous pleasure and to forestall these by an act of selective expectation. If you hear the Epicurean crying out and testifying that the soul has no power of joy and tranquillity save in what it draws from the flesh, and that this is its only good, what can

you say but that he uses the soul as a kind of vessel to receive the strainings from the body, as men rack wine from an old and leaky jar into a new one to take age, and so think they have done some wonderful thing.

And no doubt wine may be kept and mellowed with time, but the soul preserves no more than a feeble scent of what it takes into memory; for pleasure, as soon as it has given out one hiss in the body, forthwith expires, and that little of it which lags behind in memory is but flat and like a queasy fume, as if a man should undertake to feed himself today on the stale recollection of what he ate and drank yesterday. What the Epicureans have is but the empty shadow and dream of a pleasure that has taken wing and fled away, and that serves but for fuel to foment their untamed desires, as in sleep the unreal satisfaction of thirst and love only stings to a sharper lust of waking intemperance.

Memory, though it promise a release from the vicissitudes of fortune, is still too dependent on the facts of life, too deeply implicated in the recurrence of passionate desires. There is no finality of happiness here, and so the Epicurean is driven on to further refinement. If pushed hard, he will take refuge in imagining a possible painlessness of the body and a possible stability of untroubled ease. Life itself, in some rare instances, may afford the substance of this comfort, and memory then will be sufficient; but if the substance eludes us, we have still that within us which by the exercise of free will can lull the mind into fancying it remembers what it never possessed.

Step by step the reflective hedonist has been driven by the lessons of experience from the pursuit of positive pleasure to acquiescence in pleasure conceived as the removal of pain; from present ease in the flesh to the subtilizing power of memory in the mind, and, when memory is starved, to the voluntary imagination that life has gone well with him. The fabled ataraxy, or imperturbable calm, of the Epicurean turns out to be something very like a pale beatitude of illusory abstraction from the tyranny of facts, the wilful mirage of a soul which imagines itself, but is not really, set apart from the material universe of chance and change. "Habeo, non habeor," was the challenge of Aristippus to the world; the master of the Garden will be content with the more modest half : Non habeor.

There is something to startle the mind in this defensive conclusion of a philosophy which opened its attack on life under such brave and flaunting colours. There is much to cause reflection when one considers how in the end hedonism is forced into an unnatural conjunction with the other monistic philosophy with which its principles are in such violent conflict. For this ataraxy of the avowed lover of ease and pleasure can scarcely be distinguished from the apathy which the Stoic devotees of pain and labour glorified as the goal of life.

This is strange. It is stranger still, remembering this negative conclusion of Epicurean and Stoic, by which good becomes a mere deprivation of evil, to cast the mind forward to the metaphysics of another and later school of monism which led the Neoplatonist to reckon evil as a mere deprivation of good. Into such paradoxical combinations and antagonisms we are driven as soon as we try to shun the simple truth that good is good and evil is evil, each in its own right and judged by its immediate effect in the soul.

It may appear from the foregoing that the hedonist, in his pursuit of the summum bonum, argues from point to point in a straight line; in practice he seems rather to follow no single guide, but to fluctuate between two disparate yet inseparable motives. At one time, in a world where sensation is the only criterion of truth and the basis of all reality, the liberty of enjoyment is the lure that draws him on; at another - a world of chance and change or of mechanical law which takes no great heed of our wants, it seems as if security from misadventure must be the limit of man's desire. Other philosophers, the Platonist in his vision of the world of Ideas, the Christian in his submission to the will of God, may see their way running straight before them to the one sure goal of spiritual happiness, in which liberty and security join hands. The path of the hedonist wavers from side to side, aiming now at positive pleasure and now at mere escape from pain; and this, I take it, is one of the curious reprisals of truth, that the dualist should have in view a single end, whereas the monist should be distracted by a double purpose.

Whether one or the other of the revolving objects shall stand out clearer before the hedonist's gaze, will depend perhaps chiefly upon his temperament. With an Aristippus the pleasure of the moment is supreme, though he too will have his eye open for the need of safety; with an Epicurus, more timid by nature and more reflective, the thought of security at the last will almost, if never quite, obliterate the enticement of pleasure. It was still as a good Epicurean that Horace could write :

Sperne voluptates, nocet empta dolore voluptas.

Display More

Post by "Cassius" of May 28, 2023 at 1:59 PM

I think a lot of More's problem can be traced back, and thus met head on, by identifying that his argument rest on an absolutist viewpoint:

Quote

Into such paradoxical combinations and antagonisms we are driven as soon as we try to shun the simple truth that good is good and evil is evil, each in its own right and judged by its immediate effect in the soul.

And yet never in this argument does he identify what the good is, or what the evil is, other than hint that it exists somewhere and that Epicurus is a fool for not realizing it. Probably the rest of the book includes something that would tell us whether More is a skeptic, and maintains that good and evil really don't exist at all, or (more likely) that he places knowledge of them in religion or in "logic," but as I see it that's the basic issue. Epicurus is honest enough to go with allowing Nature to be the judge of this through the feelings of pleasure and pain. More has some other and allegedly higher point of reference, for the existence of which I personally (and I think Epicurus) see no good evidence for believing in.

Post by "Cassius" of May 28, 2023 at 2:09 PM

I'm now out of time to read further in More, but boy he seems to exemplify all that goes wrong when you start out thinking that Epicurus is all about running from pain. The ethical ideal of the garden is summed up as "*living unknown?*" Really?

Quote

Certainly, when we pass from consideration of the chief good to the philosophical theories which Epicurus developed to explain and justify his choice of that good, the idea of security becomes altogether predominant ; it is the keynote equally of his ethics, his science, and his attitude towards religion.

The ethical ideal of the Garden is summed up in the famous maxim, "Live concealed" (*lathe biosas*), or, as Horace exquisitely phrases it, the *fallentis semita vitae*. In this way alone would the perfect ataraxy be attained.

Post by "Cassius" of May 30, 2023 at 9:22 PM

Editing of this episode is not complete but is going pretty well. I do see that I need to apologize however that I was sick for this episode and my congestion comes through - so please remember when you start listening to it that both Don and Joshua were present for this

podcast, as well as Martin and Kalosyni, and once you get past my initial introduction the rest of the podcasters pick up the slack very nicely.

Post by “Cassius” of May 31, 2023 at 3:51 PM

I think the line from Torquatus referenced above deserves emphasis for a while, and I've added it to a rotation for the top of the front page. Here is the Latin of Torquatus' response to Cicero:

"Non prorsus," inquit, "omnesque qui sine dolore sint in voluptate, et ea quidem summa, esse dico."

Pretty clear and direct and without much effort to massage into good English:

All who are without pain are in pleasure, and in that which [is] highest!

Omnes qui sine dolore sint in voluptate, et ea quidem summa.

I may never be able to remember the Greek version, but that Latin I think I can remember 😊

Post by “Don” of May 31, 2023 at 4:57 PM

Now for something completely different:

I believe I mentioned Fat Men's Clubs in this episode's recording:

[Fat men's club - Wikipedia](#)

Post by “Cassius” of May 31, 2023 at 4:58 PM

Santa Claus would be proud!

Post by “Cassius” of June 1, 2023 at 7:31 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3090-episode-176-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-28-chapter-12-the-new-hedonism-05/>

Closing in (hopefully) in completing editing of this episode, I am going to cut out a lengthy tangent in which we tried (pretty unsuccessfully) to decode Cicero's statement in Tusculun Disputations 5.9.24-25 (attributed to Theophrastus, I think?) to the effect that:

"the happy life cannot mount the scaffold to the wheel"

Rather than delete it entirely, however, I want to preserve it here, because DeWitt mentions it in this section and it would probably be a good idea to get a grip on the meaning.

EDIT - I am going to leave some of it in. I think Joshua comes up with the right interpretation, that the issue is that of mounting the steps to one's execution, to which we can attach the first part -- that Theophrastus may be alleging that the "happy man" cannot continue to be happy when he is undergoing execution. Perhaps.

Post by "Don" of June 1, 2023 at 7:49 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"the happy life cannot mount the scaffold to the wheel"

I've given that some extra thought. Joshua also helped me understand this during the recording. I'll admit it's still a little obscure. Here's my summary so far:

- It is in response to the idea that the "The wise one will have a sense of fulfillment (eudaimonia) even on the rack."
- The "mount" is not "attach" but rather "climb a set of steps" as in to mount a horse.
- One mounts the steps to the scaffold to be hung.
- The torture wheel is not up a set of stairs so you don't climb stairs to the wheel.
- Joshua also brought up that maybe you have to willingly walk up steps but can be dragged to the wheel and strapped to it.

Like I said, still obscure, but like Cassius I wanted to preserve our thoughts.

PS. LOL... Or maybe it does mean you can't attach two torture devices together and still be happy. I really don't know! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of June 1, 2023 at 9:26 AM

Thanks Don. As i said i left some of the discussion in the podcast, and it will be interesting to hear what other people think.

At the moment I am thinking that since the theme of the section revolves around the possibility of continuous pleasure / happiness, and that Epicurus' opponents would have wanted to argue that happiness is not possible while being tortured, and that the imagery is intended to stress that point - that continuous happiness is NOT possible in life due to events such as torture (and no doubt other much lesser pains). Thus to the effect that 'happiness" cannot accompany the victim as he walks up the scaffold to the torture/execution. That somewhere along the way happiness leaves the victim while he is still alive, and thus they seek to prove their argument that happiness/pleasure cannot be continuously present in life.

That interpretation would seem consistent with the importance that these guys attached to Epicurus contention (and to their intense desire to refute it) that continuous pleasure is possible.

But i will be very interested to hear what others think.

Post by “Cassius” of June 1, 2023 at 9:33 AM

Episode 176 of the podcast is now available!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/54065241>

Post by “Godfrey” of June 1, 2023 at 4:25 PM

Some thoughts on the neutral state:

What are the limits of the neutral state?

To me, insisting on a neutral state is a means of jackhammering all of the subtlety out of Epicurean ethics (something which the "insufferable" Cicero loves to do). First, it removes the usefulness of pleasure and pain as guides unless you can determine the limits of pleasure, pain

and the neutral state. Practically speaking, when I was new to this philosophy and began to examine the supposed neutral state, I discovered that it is more properly described as the "oblivious state". The more that I looked, the more pleasure and pain I discovered in what I previously would have considered to be without feeling, and the more information I realized was available for exploring the guidance of the feelings. A classic method of negating any idea that one opposes is to reduce it to a slogan, and in fact this is what the neutral state is if you look closely.

The affective circumplex illustrates this well. An opponent of Epicurus might say that the point 0,0 is the neutral state and that the goal is to hit and remain at that target. This bothered me when I first encountered the circumplex. But if you attempt to pinpoint any point on the circumplex you soon see that you really can't: each point represents a fleeting moment in time. As you try to zero in on any particular point in the circumplex you realize that your attention to the subtlety of the feelings must increase the closer you get to the point that you are trying to pin down. 0,0 is simply the limit of either side of the axes.

Post by "Don" of June 1, 2023 at 4:48 PM

And as Lisa Feldman Barrett has said, there is never a moment when you're not feeling some kind of affect. In other words, you're never not feeling a feeling... Unless you're dead.

There literally is no neutral state.

Post by "Cassius" of June 1, 2023 at 5:44 PM

I am seeing a clear parallel between this sparring over three states or two with the similar definition issue of the nature of the Gods.

I share Epicurus' view of the true nature of both, but I also accept the fact of life that Cicero is right that the vast majority of normal people do not speak that way, either as to pleasure or as to gods.

And I have to admit that in Book 2 Cicero states a powerful case that it is Epicurus who is doing violence to normal terminology.

So as an advocate for Epicurus I am continuing to look for a way to address this terminology issue in a way that seems persuasive. I am convinced he and we are right, but being right on who had the green light still can leave you quite dead and on the losing end of a personal injury lawsuit 😊

So I don't see this primarily as a question of fact either as to gods or as to two states, but as a question of how to deal, when we are in a small minority, that it is we who are saying that the "standard definition" is wrong.

Dewitt addresses this when he says that the human race would be better off for adopting Epicurus' definitions, but I am not sure we yet have articulated a path from where we are to where we want to be.

So I think that direction - finding new ways to explain both the facts and the terminology very clearly and persuasively with wit and wisdom - is the way forward.

Post by “Cassius” of June 1, 2023 at 7:53 PM

This is powerful stuff, and it demands a clear answer:

Quote from Cicero To Torquatus, in Book 2 of On Ends

But Epicurus, as I imagine, is both willing, if it is in his power, to speak intelligibly, and is also speaking, not of an obscure subject like the natural philosophers, nor of one depending on precise rules, as the mathematicians are, but he is discussing a plain and simple matter, which is a subject of common conversation among the common people. Although you do not deny that we understand the usual meaning of the word voluptas, but only what he means by it: from which it follows, not that we do not understand what is the meaning of that word, but that he follows his own fashion, and neglects our usual one; for if he means the same thing that Hieronymus does, who thinks that the chief good is to live without any annoyance, why does he prefer using the term “pleasure” rather than freedom from pain, as Hieronymus does, who is quite aware of the force of the words which he employs? But, if he thinks that he ought to add, that pleasure which consists in [pg 132] motion, (for this is the distinction he draws, that this agreeable pleasure is pleasure in motion, but the pleasure of him who is free from pain is a state of pleasure,) then why does he appear to aim at what is impossible, namely, to make any one who knows himself—that is to say, who has any proper comprehension of his own nature and sensations—think freedom from pain, and

pleasure, the same thing?

This, O Torquatus, is doing violence to one's senses; it is wresting out of our minds the understanding of words with which we are imbued; for who can avoid seeing that these three states exist in the nature of things: first, the state of being in pleasure; secondly, that of being in pain; thirdly, that of being in such a condition as we are at this moment, and you too, I imagine, that is to say, neither in pleasure nor in pain; in such pleasure, I mean, as a man who is at a banquet, or in such pain as a man who is being tortured. What! do you not see a vast multitude of men who are neither rejoicing nor suffering, but in an intermediate state between these two conditions? No, indeed, said he; I say that all men who are free from pain are in pleasure, and in the greatest pleasure too. Do you, then, say that the man who, not being thirsty himself, mingles some wine for another, and the thirsty man who drinks it when mixed, are both enjoying the same pleasure?

But when I go through the letter the Menoecus, and the positive sections of Torquatus in Book One and Two of On Ends, the statements I am listing below are the only "explanations" that I find. These are not really explanations at all, but a series of "assertions" that are united only by the connection that we have defined there to be only two feelings, pleasure and pain, with no middle ground. So what is the total effect when we string these together: (my comments after number 14):

1. For it is to obtain this end that we always act, namely, to avoid pain and fear. (Menoecus)
2. For it is then that we have need of pleasure, when we feel pain owing to the absence of pleasure; (but when we do not feel pain), we no longer need pleasure. (Menoecus)
3. "When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind." (Menoecus)
4. 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. (Menoecus)
5. 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. (Torquatus Book One)
6. [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. (Torquatus Book One)
 7. [39] But actually at Athens, as my father used to tell me, when he wittily and humorously ridiculed the Stoics, there is in the Ceramicus a statue of Chrysippus, sitting with his hand extended, which hand indicates that he was fond of the following little argument: *Does your hand, being in its present condition, feel the lack of anything at all? Certainly of nothing. But if pleasure were the supreme good, it would feel a lack. I agree. Pleasure then is not the supreme good.* My father used to say that even a statue would not talk in that way, if it had power of speech. The inference is shrewd enough as against the Cyrenaics, but does not touch Epicurus. For if the only pleasure were that which, as it were, tickles the senses, if I may say so, and attended by sweetness overflows them and insinuates itself into them, neither the hand nor any other member would be able to rest satisfied with the absence of pain apart from a joyous activity of pleasure. But if it is the highest pleasure, as Epicurus believes, to be in no pain, then the first admission, that the hand in its then existing condition felt no lack, was properly made to you, Chrysippus, but the second improperly, I mean that it would have felt a lack had pleasure been the supreme good. It would certainly feel no lack, and on this ground, that anything which is cut off from the state of pain is in the state of pleasure. (Torquatus Book One)
 8. Well, then, said I, you are aware of what Hieronymus²⁵ 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. (Torquatus responding to Cicero in On Ends Book Two)
 9. We 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. (Torquatus responding to Cicero in On Ends Book Two)
 10. 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. (Torquatus responding to Cicero in On Ends Book Two)

11. Why, then, said I, do you call things so unlike one another by the same name? Do not [pg 129] you recollect, he rejoined, what I said just now,—that when all pain is banished, pleasure is varied, not extinguished? (Torquatus responding to Cicero in On Ends Book Two)
12. Now, if that is the variety you mean, I should understand you, as, in fact, I do understand you, without your saying so: but still, I do not see clearly what that variety is, because you say, that when we are free from pain we are then in the enjoyment of the greatest pleasure; but when we are eating those things which cause a pleasing motion to the senses, then there is a pleasure in the emotion which causes a variety in the pleasure; but still, that that pleasure which arises from the freedom from pain is not increased ;—and why you call that pleasure I do not know. (Cicero restating Torquatus in On Ends Book Two)
13. IV. Is it possible, said he, for anything to be more delightful than freedom from pain? Well, said I, but grant that nothing is preferable to that, (for that is not the point which I am inquiring about at present,) does it follow on that account, that pleasure is identical with what I may call painlessness? Undoubtedly it is identical with it, said he; and that painlessness is the greatest of pleasures which no other can possibly exceed. (Torquatus responding to Cicero in On Ends Book Two)
14. They are also two distinct things, that you may not think that the difference consists only in words and names. One is to be without pain, the other to be with pleasure. But your school not only attempt to make one name for these two things which are so exceedingly unlike, (for I would not mind that so much,) but you endeavour also to make one thing out of the two, which is utterly impossible. But Epicurus, who admits both things, ought to use both expressions, and in fact he does divide them in reality, but still he does not distinguish between them in words. For though he in many places praises that very pleasure which we all call by the same name, he ventures to say that he does not even suspect that there is any good whatever unconnected with that kind of pleasure which Aristippus means; and he makes this statement in the very place where his whole discourse is about the chief good. But in another book, in which he utters opinions of the greatest weight in a concise form of words, and in which he is said to have delivered oracles of wisdom, he writes in those words which you are well acquainted with, O Torquatus. For who is there of you who has not learnt the κύρια δόξαι of Epicurus, that is to say, his fundamental maxims? because they are sentiments of the greatest gravity intended to guide men to a happy life, and enunciated with suitable brevity. Consider, therefore, whether I am not translating this maxim of his correctly. “If those things which are the efficient causes of pleasures to luxurious men were to release them from all fear of the gods, and of death, and of pain, and to show them what are the proper limits to their desires, we should have nothing to find fault with; as men would then be filled with pleasures from all quarters, and have on no side anything painful or melancholy, for all such things are evil.” (Cicero, summarizing his complaint to Torquatus in Book 2)

To me, this is in fact, as Cicero is labeling it, a war of a non-standard definition of pleasure against the "standard" definition of pleasure, just like goes on in regard to Gods. In fact I think Cicero could make the exact same argument as to [Epicurean gods](#) as to Epicurean pleasure -- Why does Epicurus insist on labeling as "gods" beings who appear to exist without all the attributes that every other Greek and Roman think that they have?

No doubt there was and is an answer to this, and Cicero strategically decided to omit it from On Ends, even though it almost certainly would have been explained at length in other Epicurean writing.

So it seems to me that just as with "the gods," Epicurus has reached a conclusion based on his observations of nature (1-that there are no supernatural realms or beings, and 2- that there is no guidance on how to live other than pleasure and pain) and he is taking those as givens and rewriting his vocabulary accordingly. Neither he nor Torquatus make any effort whatsoever to describe what specific positive actions the gods are taking, or what specific pleasures or pains we are experiencing - they are both reducing the question to one of math-like logic, from which they will derive all their specifics as if from a theorem. They aren't saying much of anything specific about gods except that they exist confidently in perfect bliss, and they aren't saying much of anything about what a person is or should do at a particular moment other than that we should seek pleasure and avoid pain, with the logical extreme being that we should seek 100% pleasure and 0% pain, with the result that the primary only logical point is that the absence of pain is pleasure, and the total absence of pain is total (the limit) of pleasure.

Epicurus didn't need modern science to confirm his opinions about atoms or gods or pleasure -- he was reasoning absolutely logically based on observation of things around him, and he was denying the truth of supernatural worlds or supernatural ideas or ideal forms or essences or anything which cannot logically be validated by the senses.

I am not sure exactly what these observations I am making leads to, but I would say that part of the conclusion is that adding modern scientific observations to the mix adds to our level of satisfaction with the conclusion, but whether we have one researcher or 100 researchers on indivisibility or gods or pleasure, Epicurus would not say that the strength of his argument is really improved. That's because the argument really rests on commitment to having confidence in what we can learn through the senses when we apply our minds in a rigorously reasonable manner.

I also think it means that it is an error to look at "pleasure is the absence of pain" as if we were doctors cataloging types of pleasures or types of pains or trying to doctor around with them or diagnose some as "better" or "worse." The point is that just as with the gods, where correct definitions lead to deeper understanding of how divinity is not to be feared but to be admired, with "pleasure," when considering its role in human life, a correct definition of pleasure as all of the many experiences of life which we experience as not involving pain leads us to realize that life itself (especially in comparison to the nothingness of death) is pleasurable and to be savored.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 1, 2023 at 9:28 PM

[Cassius](#) I think you're leading right up to the answer to your question. The best way to discuss pleasure, pain and neutral is by leading with the sensations and feelings, not by leading with logic. As it's playoff season in many sports right now, think of it as making use of the home court advantage. Cicero and his ilk have claimed the home court and are refusing to play an away game.

Rather than play Cicero's game, we could design an exercise to lead through a Canonic process. Ask if the person is in a neutral state at the moment. If not, what are they experiencing and how would they describe it in terms of pleasure or pain? If they say that they are in a neutral state, ask them where they typically feel pain or stress in their body. Then ask them how that spot feels now. Is it neutral? Whether yes or no, have them try relaxing the spot and describe how that feels. The idea is to get them to experience the subtleties of the feelings, and then to understand that they are guides. It all begins there, and that's where the argument should begin. We need to get back on our home court.

Post by “Cassius” of June 1, 2023 at 9:29 PM

[Martin](#):

Can you help me figure out if there is a more "symbolic" way (algebra or whatever, with symbols) to express the following:

Let the universe be A and B and nothing else.

Let A be defined as the opposite of / negation of B with no ability to combine the two.

(1) Therefore absence of A = B

(2) Therefore absence of B = A

For any universe composed of only A and B and nothing else:

(1)The maximum A is the absence of B.

(2) The maximum B is the absence of A.

(3) In the absence of A and B there is nothing.

Obviously I would eventually substitute pleasure and pain for A and B, but it seems to me that the "dogmatism" of Torquatus in taking the firm positions that he does is best expressed by identifying that he is treating the issue as a logical construct such as this, which derives itself from the basic conclusion that pain and pleasure are the only feelings, as stated (if I recall) in the letter to Herodotus and amplified in PD3.

Post by "Cassius" of June 1, 2023 at 9:38 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

he best way to discuss pleasure, pain and neutral is by leading with the sensations and feelings, not by leading with logic.

Godfrey I agree that is the *best* way, and I think that is what Torquatus is reporting was insisted on by Epicurus himself in stating that no more proof is necessary or appropriate than pointing to animals and pleasure and snow and the like.

But it's not the **only** and as Torquatus said it appears the later Epicureans (and I think Epicurus himself too) decided that for multiple reasons we cannot abandon the field of logic and philosophy itself to the pin-head Platonists. So if we are going to argue for pleasure on philosophic grounds, we have to have rigorous and bullet-proof logical statement of how all this fits together.

Were Emily Austin to say "I think Epicurus was right -- look at what babies do! - I rest my case" and close her book and sit down for the rest of the semester, she would likely be in very hot water, and probably not satisfied with herself either.

So I don't think there is really an tension here -- for those who will accept the direct physical example that you mentioned, that is all that is needed.

But are those people really going to be secure in their confidence that they are correct if they pick up literally ANY book or article written by anyone whose last name is not DeWitt or Austin and read what they have to say about Epicurus?

Unfortunately I am afraid the answer is clear and we have to BOTH attack on common-sense observation, and on on logical philosophic grounds, just like the ancient epicureans did.

I was thinking just a minute ago something related to this; In [Philebus](#), Plato has [Philebus](#) stab his argument in the heart by admiring that pleasure has no limit. In On Ends, Cicero cannot bring himself (probably on pain of an Epicurean uprising) to put words in Torquatus' mouth that

undermine his own case. Torquatus never deviates from the Epicurean formula, and all of his statements are textbook Epicurean correctness. But what Cicero does NOT do is allow Torquatus to give a full explanation of Epicurus' reasoning that goes into detail about how Epicurus reached these conclusions.

We can do that today, by mining Lucretius and the rest of the texts and interpolating between the lines what was really going on in Epicurus' argument.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 2, 2023 at 1:21 AM

This is true, but I don't think that Epicurus' ideas became as widespread as they were in antiquity by way of logical arguments. Obviously there were logical arguments going on, but my speculation is that the commoner Epicureans that Cicero griped about would have understood the philosophy through direct experience. The practice of frank speech would have been one method to help to analyze direct experience. Logical arguments lose their persuasiveness once one has a visceral understanding of a philosophy.

The nurturing of nuanced observation of pleasures, pains and desires may once have been a group activity in the Garden, but now we're left to figure it out on our own. Perhaps there's a way to reintroduce a semi-structured version of this type of observation for our current situation. It might begin with a tightly focused exercise and advance from there. And such an exercise, or series of exercises, could be of interest to people who are looking for alternatives to the popular Stoic exercises.

Post by “Cassius” of June 2, 2023 at 6:07 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

It might begin with a tightly focused exercise and advance from there. And such an exercise, or series of exercises, could be of interest to people who are looking for alternatives to the popular Stoic exercises.

I find this very interesting, and I agree that there is a significant segment to which this will appeal and we need to develop it.

But in the end I don't see Lucretius or Diogenes of Oinoanda or whoever the original source of Torquatus' words was showing evidence that they themselves were primarily pursuing that kind of approach. I see where Cassius Longinus wrote that the philosophy of virtue is hard to understand, while the philosophy of pleasure is not, and that might be a hint of such an approach. And I definitely think that once you grasp the issues viscerally you see the big picture in emotional or even sensual terms every bit as strongly as Cicero would assert the glories of virtue. I guess where I end up is "different strokes for different folks" and that it looks to me that both Epicurus and the later Epicureans thought both approaches were important.

And if we were to use Lucretius as a pattern, we should start always with the senses and observe that it is pleasure that drives the ships and the birds and the bees and everything else. But after we make that first observation we then appropriately spend six books and tens of thousands of words tracing down the logical path that follows from the first premise: that while pleasure rules life, the next step is not just to stand silent and observe, but then to use our minds and bodies to follow the observation that nothing comes from nothing, and then mentally and physically trace literally everything else out from there so that we too can successfully follow pleasure, just like the birds and the bees do without worrying about why. Our ships require both approaches to continue sailing, or else we are in danger of being seduced to leave them in port with sails furled and oars out of the water, which is not what ships are for.

Post by “Don” of June 2, 2023 at 10:50 AM

As an aside: Having been on the recording side of this podcast episode, I want to give public ΚΥΔΟΣ (kudos) to [Cassius](#) for a masterful editing job on this one! Well done!

Post by “Don” of June 2, 2023 at 11:35 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But it's not the ****only**** and as Torquatus said it appears the later Epicureans (and I think Epicurus himself too) decided that for multiple reasons we cannot abandon the field of logic and philosophy itself to the pin-head Platonists. So if we are going to argue for pleasure on philosophic grounds, we have to have rigorous and bullet-proof logical statement of how all this fits together.

You keep using the word "logic" and I think we have to narrow down our terms. As I understand it, Epicurus's opposition was to Socratic-style dialectic, διαλεκτικός, defined by LSJ as "dialectic, discussion by question and answer, invented by Zeno of Elea, Arist.Fr.65; philosophical method." He didn't want to walk around, endlessly debating what things meant. He wanted to point to nature and declare, "There! Right there! **That** is what we mean (or should mean) when we say X." In that sense, I think he was "dogmatic" in the sense of taking a stand, planting his flag, and torpedoes be damned.

Now, he took those assertions and inferred larger points from them, but, as a starting point, he pointed to - what he saw as - the foundational meaning of words as phenomena existing in Nature and treated them as axioms as we might say. "An axiom is a proposition in mathematics and epistemology that is taken to be self-evident or is chosen as a starting point of a theory."

Later Epicureans got cold feet and got intimidated by other schools and their fancy arguments. I think Epicurus stood his ground as to the self-evident nature of his assertions on what was meant by pleasure, and the gods for that matter.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Were Emily Austin to say "I think Epicurus was right -- look at what babies do! - I rest my case" and close her book and sit down for the rest of the semester, she would likely be in very hot water, and probably not satisfied with herself either

That strikes me as a reductio ad absurdum. Epicurus didn't stop at his assertion, but used it as a foundation upon which to build.

Post by "Cassius" of June 2, 2023 at 12:10 PM

Right to all. I am using "logic" loosely for dialectic or just generally these elaborate and abstract constructions that we get into as we go back and forth dealing with the assorted traps and diversions that people like Plato or Paul or Plotinus create.

Post by "Joshua" of June 4, 2023 at 11:48 AM

Regarding the difficult quote from Theophrastus that "The happy man cannot mount the scaffold to the wheel," I found [this](#) confession of a 19th century Parisian: "*I demand to expiate*

it; — I accept the responsibility; — I wish to mount the scaffold." This indicates at least to me that 'mounting the scaffold' to be hanged connotes volition on the part of the condemned. Theophrastus might well be saying that it is impossible to willingly undergo torture, and Epicurus responds by saying that one might well undergo torture willingly to save a friend.

Also relevant are these lines from Shakespeare's Richard II:

"O, who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast?
Or wallow naked in December snow
By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?
O, no! the apprehension of the good
Gives but the greater feeling to the worse:
Fell sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more
Than when he bites, but lanceth not the sore."

Post by "Martin" of June 5, 2023 at 5:09 AM

The oldest references to the wheel as an execution tool go back to late antiquity in Germany. I found no mentioning of execution or torture with the wheel by ancient Romans and Greeks. Therefore, Theophrastus most likely means something else with scaffold and wheel.

Post by "Don" of June 5, 2023 at 7:47 AM

The Loeb translation has a footnote referencing a Greek phrase: στρεβλοῦσθαι ἐπὶ τροχοῦ to stretch on the wheel or rack, to rack, torture

Post by “Joshua” of June 5, 2023 at 8:05 AM

"Ixion was expelled from Olympus and blasted with a thunderbolt. Zeus ordered Hermes to bind Ixion to a winged fiery wheel that was always spinning. Therefore, Ixion was bound to a burning solar wheel for all eternity, at first spinning across the heavens,[18] but in later myth transferred to Tartarus.[19][20] Only when Orpheus played his lyre during his trip to the Underworld to rescue Eurydice did it stop for a while."

Post by “Don” of June 5, 2023 at 8:15 AM

[M. Tullius Cicero, Tusculanae Disputationes, book 5, section 24](#)

in eo etiam putatur dicere in rotam— id est genus quoddam tormenti apud Graecos⁶—beatam vitam non escendere.⁷ non usquam⁸ id quidem dicit omnino, sed quae dicit, idem valent.

⁶ id est ... Graecos del. Er. vix recte. τροχὸς ante hunc locum a Romanis non commemoratur. (in R his verbis linea subducta est, sed s. XVII/XVIII demum sec. Stroux) ge- nus R

[Greek Word Study Tool](#)

wheel of torture, Anacr.21.9; “ἐπὶ τοῦ τ. στρεβλοῦσθαι” Ar.PI.875, Lys.846, D.29.40; “ἔλκεσθαι” Ar.Pax452; “ἐπὶ τὸν τ. ἀναβῆναι” Antipho 5.40; “ἀναβιβάζειν τινὰ ἐπὶ τὸν τ.” And.1.43; “ἐν τῷ τ. ἐνδεδεμένον” Plu.2.509c; τῷ τ. προσηλοῦν [Ἰξίονα] ib.19e, cf. Luc. DDeor.6.5.

PS:

[Antiphon, On the murder of Herodes, section 40](#)

[40] Also let me point out to you that at the start, before being placed on the wheel, in fact, until extreme pressure was brought to bear, the man adhered to the truth and declared me innocent. It was only when on the wheel, and when driven to it, that he falsely incriminated me, in order to put an end to the torture.

[Antiphon \(orator\) - Wikipedia](#)