

Cicero's Argument That Epicureans Do Not Esteem Mental Pleasures

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2023 at 11:40 AM

Here's something we discussed from Cicero in today's podcast:

Quote

[Quote from Cicero On Ends Reid Book 1 VII 25](#) What pleasure do you, Torquatus, or what does our friend Triarius here derive from literature, from records and the investigation of historical facts, from conning the poets, from learning by heart so laboriously so many lines? And do not say to me "Why, these very actions bring me pleasure, as theirs did to the Torquati!"

Never indeed did Epicurus or Metrodorus or any one possessed of any wisdom or any knowledge of the tenets of your school ever maintain such a position by such arguments

This is a blatant misrepresentation of Epicurus. If ANY activity which does not bring pain is pleasant, then reading any literature, or poetry, or history is going to being AT LEAST the type of pleasure that the hand experiences when it is not in pain (per the Chryssipus argument) and of course it is generally going to bring about a much more stimulating pleasure if it is good poetry, literature, or history.

It should be obvious that when we are in physical pain we often seek mental pleasure as a way of getting our minds off that pain, but Cicero seems to want to allege that Epicureans seek nothing but immediate sensory bodily pleasure.

This is blatantly false under Epicurean theory, and Cicero should (and likely did) know better.

The responsive argument would include:

1 - There are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, and if we are feeling anything at all we are feeling one or the other. [Diogenes Laertius 34 "The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined."]

2 - [PD03](#). "The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once."