

Cicero Attributing To Epicurus The View That Virtuous Action Is Itself Pleasurable

Post by “Cassius” of September 3, 2023 at 9:56 PM

This is from our podcast discussion of 9/03/23, taken from On Ends, Book 1:VII:25. It seems to me that this is a very important sentence and that the Latin should be scrutinized to confirm that the translations are correct, especially as to whether Cicero is saying that virtue is "productive of pleasure" or is itself "pleasurable."

Here is Reid:

"And when the question is asked, as it often is, why Epicureans are so numerous, I answer that there are no doubt other motives, but the motive which especially fascinates the crowd is this; they believe their chief to declare that all upright and honorable actions are in themselves productive of delight, or rather pleasure."

Here is Rackham from the Loeb edition:

Again as to the question often asked, why so many men are Epicureans, though it is not the only reason, the thing that most attracts the crowd is the belief that Epicurus declares right conduct and moral worth to be intrinsically and of themselves delightful, which means productive of pleasure.

Here is the Latin:

Et quod quaeritur saepe cur tam multi sint Epicurei, sunt aliae quoque causae, sed multitudinem haec maxime allicit quod ita putant dici ab illo, recta et honesta quae sint, ea facere ipsa per se laetitiam, id est voluptatem.

Post by “Don” of September 3, 2023 at 10:10 PM

Quote from Google Translate

And it is often asked why there are so many Epicureans, there are other reasons as well, but this multitude is especially attracted by the fact that they think that to be told by him, whatever is right and honorable, to do them is in itself a joy, that is, a pleasure.

I would agree with this sentiment, that acting right and honorable itself is pleasurable. Isn't this basically what [PD05](#) says?

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2023 at 10:17 PM

Yes I think he is right there in what is stated on the face of it, but Cicero is ridiculing the concept as if no Epicurean (or anyone else) should believe it.

As I see it Cicero is continuing his argument stated nearby that it is ridiculous to argue that reading history and literature and poetry is pleasurable -- he is building up his argument on the premise that pleasure means only "sex, drugs, and rock and roll."

That's why I think this is revealing. Cicero is basing a LOT of his argument all the way through the whole book on making people believe that pleasure means only bodily and immediate sensory stimulation.

And that's why I think this is a great sentence to contemplate -- an Epicurean needs to understand that ALL action which isn't painful is pleasurable, including what Cicero likes to think of as worthy and virtuous action that Cicero likes to reserve as a "higher" way of life.

As for the worthy and virtuous actions that are immediately painful, like in the wartime examples, an Epicurean would perform those, just as Torquatus eventually answers, because sometimes we choose painful actions when they lead to more less pain or more pleasure later.

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2023 at 10:24 PM

As for my comment about whether virtuous action is pleasurable itself or instead "productive of pleasure," I am asking that because I think the general rule is that ALL action which is not painful is pleasurable. So I would say that virtuous action which is not immediately painful -- like contemplating art or literature or history is virtuous because it involves wisdom) --- those virtues ARE pleasurable immediately, and like with philosophy, you don't have to wait on some future time for pleasure to arrive.

I am convinced that it is key to the entire Epicurean position to take the position that whatever you are doing (and if you are doing it you are feeling it) in life, unless it is immediately painful, must be and should be considered pleasurable in itself. This is essential in establishing that

pleasure is not limited to "sex drugs rock and roll" and that when you are not feeling pain you are feeling pleasure, and indeed that the highest quantity of pleasure is when there is no pain at all.

So I would expect the Latin might say that the virtuous action being referred to IS pleasurable rather than implying that pleasure is a later product, as the "productive of pleasure" translation might imply.

Post by "Don" of September 3, 2023 at 10:36 PM

ea facere ipsa per se laetitiam.

id est voluptatem.

doing them is a joy in itself.

that is pleasure

laetitia

Derived from laet(us) ("happy", "glad")

joy, gladness, happiness, pleasure, delight

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2023 at 10:39 PM

Interesting to compare VS27 (Bailey):

"In all other occupations the fruit comes painfully after completion, but, in philosophy, pleasure goes hand in hand with knowledge; for enjoyment does not follow comprehension, but comprehension and enjoyment are simultaneous."

I wouldn't necessarily say that all "occupations" are painful, but here the statement links pain explicitly with the occupation.

Philosophy as an occupation could be considered like baseball as an occupation, it is often if not always pleasurable while you are doing it.

I think that Epicurean theory would say that you could (and should) argue that in any "occupation" which is not painful, then whatever you are doing should be considered pleasurable for the same reason we are discussing.

Post by “Don” of September 3, 2023 at 10:46 PM

Don't get hung up on Bailey's "occupation."

The word is ἐπιτηδεύματα.

It seems to me to be more general. Yes, it can be a job or occupation, but Woodhouse gives the range of meanings:

Woodhouse, S. C. (1910) English-Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language[1], London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited.

avocation idem, page 55.

business idem, page 106.

calling idem, page 109.

career idem, page 113.

custom idem, page 191.

employment idem, page 269.

habit idem, page 380.

hobby idem, page 402.

institution idem, page 447.

occupation idem, page 568.

practice idem, page 631.

profession idem, page 653.

pursuit idem, page 659.

routine idem, page 723.

study idem, page 829.

trade idem, page 885.

vocation idem, page 955.

work idem, page 988.

Basically, it seems it's anything that can occupy one's time.

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2023 at 10:51 PM

All leading toward a conclusion that seems to be pointed to from many directions, that Epicurus is telling us to consider being alive as itself an experience to identify as pleasurable and to take pleasure in, unless you are specifically in pain - and even then you can take pleasure because pain is short if intense and if long allows for pleasure to offset it.

Cicero is trying to twist that position into something absurd, and it's true that people are often so jaded that they no longer see the pleasure in life.

But this seems like a huge part of the Epicurean "attitude" toward life itself that explains an awful lot, and maybe even relates to this criticism of cynicism and jadedness in Lucretius:

Lucretius Book 2:1023 - "Now turn your mind, I pray, to a true reasoning. For a truth wondrously new is struggling to fall upon your ears, and a new face of things to reveal itself. Yet neither is anything so easy, but that at first it is more difficult to believe, and likewise nothing is so great or so marvelous but that little by little all decrease their wonder at it. First of all the bright clear color of the sky, and all it holds within it, the stars that wander here and there, and the moon and the sheen of the sun with its brilliant light; all these, if now they had come to being for the first time for mortals, if all unforeseen they were in a moment placed before their eyes, what story could be told more marvelous than these things, or what that the nations would less dare to believe beforehand? Nothing, I trow: so worthy of wonder would this sight have been. Yet think how no one now, wearied with satiety of seeing, deigns to gaze up at the shining quarters of the sky! Wherefore cease to spew out reason from your mind, struck with terror at mere newness, but rather with eager judgement weigh things, and, if you see them true, lift your hands and yield, or, if it is false, gird yourself to battle."

Post by "Cassius" of September 4, 2023 at 7:22 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3314-cicero-attributing-to-epicurus-the-view-that-virtuous-action-is-itself-pleasurab/>

A little more Latin parsing:

Reid's choice of "their chief" sounds a little odd to the modern ear, so I for a moment switched that to Epicurus, but in looking at the Latin the name does appear only once, and in the context of "Epicureans" --

Et quod quaeritur saepe cur tam multi sint Epicurei, sunt aliae quoque causae, sed multitudinem haec maxime allicit quod ita putant dici ab illo, recta et honesta quae sint, ea facere ipsa per se laetitiam, id est voluptatem.

So I'll just annotate the Welcome header to say (Reid), but I wonder as a Latin exam where the reference back comes in.

Nodictionaries.com:

Et quod quaeritur saepe cur tam multi sint Epicurei,

quaero, quaerere, quaesivi, quaesitus search for, seek, strive for; obtain; ask, inquire, demand

saepe, saepius, saepissime often, oft, oftentimes, many times, frequently

cur why, wherefore; for what reason/purpose?; on account of which?; because

tam so, so much; to such an extent/degree; nevertheless, all the same

multus, multa -um, -, plurimus -a -um much, many, great, many a; large, intense, assiduous; tedious

Epicureus, Epicurea, Epicureum Epicurean, belonging to the Epicureans, following philosopher Epicurus

sunt aliae quoque causae, sed multitudinem haec maxime allicit quod ita putant

quoque likewise/besides/also/too; not only; even/actually

causa, causae F cause/reason/motive; origin, source, derivation; responsibility/blame; symptom

multitudo, multitudinis F multitude, great number; crowd; rabble, mob

allicio, allicere, allexi, allectus draw gently to, entice, lure, induce, attract, win over, encourage

puto, putare, putavi, putatus think, believe, suppose, hold; reckon, estimate, value; clear up, settle

dici ab illo, recta et honesta quae sint,

rego, regere, rexi, rectus rule, guide; manage, direct

honestus, honesta -um, honestior -or -us, honestissimus -a -um distinguished, reputable, respected, honorable, upright, honest; worthy

ea facere ipsa per se laetitia,

laetitia, laetitiae *F* joy/happiness; source of joy/delight; fertility; fruitfulness; floridity

id est voluptatem.

voluptas, voluptatis *F* pleasure, delight, enjoyment

Post by “Don” of September 4, 2023 at 7:56 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I wonder as a Latin exam where the reference back comes in.

dici ab illo

"be told by him (ie, Epicurus)"