

Episode 194 - The Epicurean Arguments In Cicero's On Ends - Book One - Part 04

Post by "Cassius" of September 30, 2023 at 11:51 AM

Welcome to Episode 194 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.

This week we continue our discussion of Books One and Two of Cicero's On Ends, which are largely devoted to Epicurean Philosophy. "On Ends" contains important criticisms of Epicurus that have set the tone for standard analysis of his philosophy for the last 2000 years. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

This week we continue in Book One, and we will be starting with section XIX. Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#)

We are using the Reid edition, so check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

As we proceed we will keep track of Cicero's arguments and outline them here:

[Cicero's Objections to Epicurean Philosophy](#)

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57029006>

Post by "Cassius" of October 2, 2023 at 9:51 AM

Episode 194 of Lucretius Today is Now Available! We cover a lot of material that is very relevant to recent discussions, so I wanted to get this out as quickly as possible.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57029006>

Post by “Joshua” of October 2, 2023 at 10:31 AM

I should caution the listener that my thoughts on 'meaning' are tentative at best, so take everything I say there, and regarding Thomas Carlyle, with a grain of salt. It does strike me as a conversation worth having, though!

Post by “Cassius” of October 2, 2023 at 12:09 PM

There are a lot of issues we need to explore from this podcast including:

1. I think we can take a common sense interpretation of Cicero's complaint that Epicurus lacks "definition" of pleasure, but there are probably some specifics we can clean from the more formal explanation of "definition" that we can use to understand what Epicurus was objecting to.
 1. Here is part of that objection from book one: "VII. And as for the second part of philosophy, which belongs to investigating and discussing, and which is called λογική, there your master as it seems to me is wholly unarmed and defenceless. He abolishes definitions; he lays down no rules for division and partition; he gives no method for drawing conclusions or establishing principles; he does not point out how captious objections may be refuted, or ambiguous terms explained. He places all our judgments of things in our senses; and if they are once led to approve of anything false as if it were true, then he thinks that there is an end to all our power of distinguishing between truth and falsehood.
2. We also need to hammer home specifically that when Torquatus is saying that a man who is conscious of anything is experiencing either pleasure or pain does not mean that there is some abstract new status of "pleasure" or "pain" that somehow in some mysterious way constitutes a new higher category, but that he is referring (as he says) to a predominance of pleasures over pains, meaning that we are experiencing many combinations of pleasure and pain at once. Pleasure and pain do not mix, and in any part of our experience we only experience one at a time, but they do coexist in different parts of our experience (or he would not have said that the wise man can experience continuous pleasure by offsetting pleasures against pains).

If anyone is aware of good articles or sources on these (particularly "definition") please post them.

Post by “Cassius” of October 2, 2023 at 12:12 PM

As to Joshua's comment I thought he did a great job as to "meaningfulness" to which I would add that "I spit upon the concept of existence of meaningfulness unless it being pleasure."



Post by “Joshua” of October 2, 2023 at 2:13 PM

Having listened to that portion now, I can say that I don't know how you managed to edit it in such a way that I nearly made sense in what I was saying! 😄

Post by “Cassius” of October 2, 2023 at 2:59 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Having listened to that portion now, I can say that I don't know how you managed to edit it in such a way that I nearly made sense in what I was saying! 😄

Not only did I think what you said made perfect sense in the big picture of things, I am going to use the same analysis to make sense of [PD18](#), [PD19](#), and [PD20](#):

Based on:

1. That [PD03](#) states: "*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.*"
2. That Diogenes Laertius tells us that Epicurus held there to be only two states of feeling, pleasure and pain.
3. That Torquatus tells us [O.E. Book One, 30] that Epicurus held that "*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?*"

4. That Torquatus tells us [O.E. Book One, 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."*
5. That Chrysippus' hand illustration is absolutely clear that the normal state of a hand is in pleasure, and in fact if the hand is totally without pain it is in the highest state of pleasure. [O.E. Book One, 39] *For if that were the only pleasure which tickled the senses, as it were, if I may say so, and which overflowed and penetrated them with a certain agreeable feeling, then even a hand could not be content with freedom from pain without some pleasing motion of pleasure. But if the highest pleasure is, as Epicurus asserts, to be free from pain, then, O Chrysippus, the first admission was correctly made to you, that the hand, when it was in that condition, was in want of nothing; but the second admission was not equally correct, that if pleasure were a good it would wish for it. For it would not wish for it for this reason, inasmuch as whatever is free from pain is in pleasure.*
6. That the comparison of the host pouring wine and the guest drinking it being in the same state of pleasure, which is clearly implied in the example, seems based on the same flat consideration that if someone (host or guest or anyone else doing anything else) is free from pain, then they are in the same state of maximum pleasure. [O.E. Book 2, V-16]: *"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?"*

Applying those to 18, 19, and 20.....

Quote

[PD18](#). The pleasure in the flesh is not increased when once the pain due to want is removed, but is only varied: and the limit as regards pleasure in the mind is begotten by the reasoned understanding of these very pleasures, and of the emotions akin to them, which used to cause the greatest fear to the mind.

[PD19](#). Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.

[PD20](#). The flesh perceives the limits of pleasure as unlimited, and unlimited time is required to supply it. But the mind, having attained a reasoned understanding of the ultimate good of the flesh and its limits, and having dissipated the fears concerning the time to come, supplies us with the complete life, and we have no further need of infinite time; but neither does the mind shun pleasure, nor, when circumstances begin to bring about the departure from life, does it approach its end as though it fell short, in any way, of the best life.

We can deduce that these observations are based on the same principal that Torquatus is explaining. If there are only two experiences, pleasure and pain, then by necessity any experience which is not painful is pleasurable. All you need to know to determine the "height of pleasure" is to realize that by definition it is the result of any combination of experiences in life of which none of them are painful. By necessity of analysis and logical deduction "pleasure" can not be further improved if it is pure pleasure.

This analysis also applies to time. The circumstance of whether a person lives one year or at thousand years adds nothing to the analysis. The height of pleasure is the same whether a person is male or female, young or old, Greek or barbarian, noble or commoner, or whatever other qualifiers you would like to add.

This analysis applies no matter what "What about?" questions you through at it. What about sex? What about drugs? What about rock'n'roll? What about world peace? What about meaningfulness? What about virtue? What about nobility? What about Wisdom. Each and every one comes under the same analysis. Each of those is valuable only so far as it brings pleasure, and each and every one of those should be spit upon if they do not bring pleasure. Infinite time contains no greater pleasure in the sense of "better" pleasure" than finite time, it just contains "more in terms of variation, but the limit of pleasure is not extended. The flesh does not understand this, and never will without a correct philosophy explaining this situation, but the mind can understand it, can enjoy the understanding, and can know that whenever the end comes it has not fallen short of the experience of the best life possible.

A reasoned understanding of the situation reveals that the height of pleasure is always the absence of pain, and that standard always applies and trumps every other consideration over every time period. Of course you want to experience more pleasure over time if that time is available to you, but no matter how long you have the "limit of pleasure" is not increased. You can vary the pleasures if you have more time, but the perspective never changes. You can never do better than "zero pain," and this perspective is understandable by the wise.

As we discussed in the episode, there are many people who - like Cicero - are not going to accept this analysis. Such people insist on a narrow definition of pleasure as including only

stimulations of the body or mind, and those are not always available for most people. For example here in book one Cicero rejects the idea that the older Torquati received mental pleasures from their actions:

1. It is possible, indeed, that I may be mistaken; but my opinion is decided that that Torquatus, who first acquired that name, did not tear the chain from off his enemy for the purpose of procuring any corporeal pleasure to himself; and that he did not, in his third consulship, fight with the Latins at the foot of Mount Vesuvius for the sake of any personal pleasure. And when he caused his son to be executed, he appears to have even deprived himself of many pleasures, by thus preferring the claims of his dignity and command to nature herself and the dictates of fatherly affection. What need I say more?

And Cicero goes so far as to say that Epicurus never defended his philosophy based on study and pursuit of mental pleasures, but this is simply false, even if we cited nothing more than Epicurus' last letter writing about the pleasant memories of associations with his friends and the pleasure he got from the study of nature:

1. What pleasure do you, O Torquatus, what pleasure does this Triarius derive from literature, and history, and the knowledge of events, and the reading of poets, and his wonderful recollection of such numbers of verses? And do not say to me, Why all these things are a pleasure to me. So, too, were those noble actions to the Torquati. [pg 106] Epicurus never asserts this in this manner; nor would you, O Triarius, nor any man who had any wisdom, or who had ever imbibed those principles.

If you accept Epicurus' explanation, that the normal experience of being alive is pleasurable at all times unless you are in pain, then you can take advantage of stimulations when they are available and take advantage of the mental pleasures of understanding (including taking pleasure in the pains you are not suffering like the shipwreck analogy in Book 2). Thus there is never a time when the wise person cannot experience a predominance of pleasure over pain, just as Epicurus was doing just before he died.

It seems to me to be very helpful to keep remembering that if you object to this analysis that the normal state of life is pleasure, then what you are doing is buying into the argument of Cicero and the non-Epicurean philosophers that indeed pleasure is limited to "sex, drugs, and rock'n roll." At this point I think I would also suggest that unless the normal state of life is identified as pleasurable, just as Norman DeWitt describes on page 240 of his book, it's pretty much impossible - or at least extremely hard - to make practical sense of Epicurean ethics.

Post by "Cassius" of October 3, 2023 at 1:54 AM

I will eventually set this up as a different topic but for the time being I think this is the first time we have addressed this, so I will keep it here. If Epicurus rejected Aristotelian essentialism as much as he rejected Plato's idealism, then it may be that Epicurus objected to definitions to the extent that they rely on purported essences. It seems there may be much more to this issue than what Torquatus briefly summarized as to Epicurus' reliance on analogizing the proof that pleasure is desirable to "look there / snow is white " -

From Wikipedia under "Definition" -

In classical thought, a definition was taken to be a statement of the essence of a thing. [Aristotle](#) had it that an object's essential attributes form its "essential nature", and that a definition of the object must include these essential attributes.[\[11\]](#)

The idea that a definition should state the essence of a thing led to the distinction between *nominal* and *real* essence—a distinction originating with Aristotle. In the [Posterior Analytics](#),[\[12\]](#) he says that the meaning of a made-up name can be known (he gives the example "goat stag") without knowing what he calls the "essential nature" of the thing that the name would denote (if there were such a thing). This led medieval logicians to distinguish between what they called the *quid nominis*, or the "whatness of the name", and the underlying nature common to all the things it names, which they called the *quid rei*, or the "whatness of the thing".[\[13\]](#) The name "[hobbit](#)", for example, is perfectly meaningful. It has a *quid nominis*, but one could not know the real nature of hobbits, and so the *quid rei* of hobbits cannot be known. By contrast, the name "man" denotes real things (men) that have a certain *quid rei*. The meaning of a name is distinct from the nature that a thing must have in order that the name apply to it.

This leads to a corresponding distinction between *nominal* and *real* definitions. A nominal definition is the definition explaining what a word means (i.e., which says what the "nominal essence" is), and is definition in the classical sense as given above. A real definition, by contrast, is one expressing the real nature or *quid rei* of the thing.

This preoccupation with essence dissipated in much of modern philosophy. [Analytic philosophy](#), in particular, is critical of attempts to elucidate the essence of a thing. [Russell](#) described essence as "a hopelessly muddle-headed notion".[\[14\]](#)

More recently [Kripke's](#) formalisation of [possible world](#) semantics in [modal logic](#) led to a new approach to [essentialism](#). Insofar as the essential properties of a thing are *necessary* to it, they are those things that it possesses in all possible worlds. Kripke refers to names used in this way as [rigid designators](#).

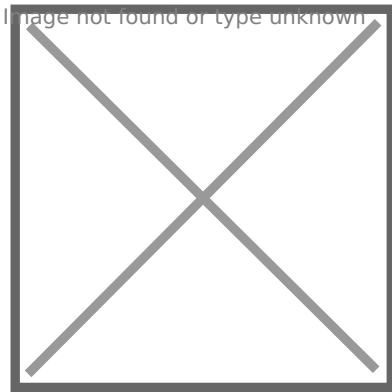
Also:

The ***Posterior Analytics*** ([Greek](#): Ἀναλυτικὰ Ὑστερα; [Latin](#): *Analytica Posteriora*) is a text from [Aristotle's](#) [Organon](#) that deals with [demonstration](#), [definition](#), and [scientific knowledge](#). The

demonstration is distinguished as a *[syllogism](#)* productive of scientific knowledge, while the definition marked as *the statement of a thing's nature, ... a statement of the meaning of the name, or of an equivalent nominal formula*

Post by “Don” of October 3, 2023 at 7:19 AM

Sedley's paper on On Nature Book 28 addresses some of that about language and definitions



[Epicurus, On nature, book 28](#)

Epicurus, On nature, book 28

www.academia.edu

Plus see:

[U258]

Erotianus, Glossary of Hippocrates, Preface, [p. 34, 10 Klein]: For if we are going to explain the words known to everybody, we would have to expound either all or some. But to expound all is impossible, whereas to expound some is pointless. For we will explain them either through familiar locutions or through unfamiliar. But unfamiliar words seem unsuited to the task, the accepted principle being to explain less known things by means of better known things; and familiar words, by being on a par with them, will be unfamiliar for illuminating language, as Epicurus says. For the informativeness of language is characteristically ruined when it is bewitched by an account, as if by a homeopathic drug.

[U92]Scholiast on Dionysius Thrax {"Dionysius the Thracian"}, The Art of Grammar, [p. 660, 25 Bekk.]: And although Epicurus always made use of general outlines {of the senses of words}, he showed that definitions are more worthy of respect by using definitions instead of general outlines in the treatise On Nature; for he used definitions when he divided the totality {of existence} into the atomic and the void, saying that "the atomic is a solid body which has no

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share of void included in it; void is an intangible nature," i.e., not subject to touch.

[U352] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, VII.3.5: A man who denies that god is a "spirit diffused through all the parts of the world" {a Stoic definition} would not be saying that it is mistaken to call the world divine, as Epicurus would, for he gave God human form and a place in the spaces between worlds.

[U451]

Antiochus of Ascalon, by way of Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* II.21 p. 179.36: These Cyrenaics reject Epicurus' definition of pleasure, i.e., the removal of pain, calling that the condition of a corpse; because we rejoice not only on account of pleasures, but companionships and distinctions; while Epicurus thinks that all joy of the soul arises from previous sensations of the flesh.

Post by "Cassius" of October 3, 2023 at 8:37 AM

Thank you again Don for your cite to this paper. There is so much buried in Sedley's work that is of use. If we had the ability to send someone back in time who could intelligently question Epicurus and relate back to us more accurately what Epicurus was really saying, David Sedley is the person I would nominate. When Sedley finally leaves us we are going to lose probably the number one interpreter of Epicurus alive today. I cannot imagine who else might approach his depth of scholarship.

I have pulled out some particularly interesting quotes, most of which are relevant to our discussion of Epicurus' view of definitions. I have not had time to clean up this text (especially as to the Greek lettering) but hopefully this will still be useful:

- - throughout our text we see the fundamental principle of the naturalist that to apply a name to an object is to express an opinion, and that language can represent' true or false opinion.
- - epicurus has no doctrine comparable to that discussed in the *Cratylus* and taken up by the stoics, that the name of a thing is an abbreviated list of its properties. His naturalism lies rather, as we shall see below, in the belief that within a language each name -c an only be correctly used to denote the one particular class of object with which it was associated in its natural origin.
- - on the other hand, epicurus himself is no great defender of predication as a tool of the philosopher. He wants concepts to be clarified by reference to the data of perceptions and feelings, not through mere verbal predication. Thus he shows strong doubts about the usefulness of definitions, 109 and, when dealing with the special case of the concept

of time, he specifically rejects the view that anything else should 'be predicated of it as sharing the same essence as it'

- - if epicurus were to regard memory as an event purely internal to the mind, the whole empirical foundation of knowledge would crumble, since our ' memories ' might be nothing more than our own inventions. The objectivity of memory is superficially rescued by the assurance 136 that the mind, like the sense-organs, draws its images from outside.
- - besides, if we are to go beyond epicurus' own writings and pin so much faith on doxographical tradition, we cannot ignore a passage of aetius 117 which contradicts bailey's account: ' leucippus, democritus and epicurus say that both perception and thought work through the entry of (I think the Greek here is "images"). From outside, since neither can concentrate (ε: ττ&: aacv) on anything independently of the δοοοαοv which makes contact '.
- - perceptions and feelings are the -only incontrovertible sources of data about the world, but since they are irrational 168 a process of reasoning is necessary whereby they can be systematised into a rational pattern of knowledge. L69 epicurus has no time for the logical categorisation of processes of inference, but nevertheless recognises the importance to the philosopher of reasoning in general (αοy'οfl6, , οουοyoo flo), of the kind of reasoning that provides an understanding of the data supplied by the sensations (εμαοy'αfl6,), and of the kind of reasoning that uses this understanding as a basis for speculation about that which is beyond perception (&vo:), οytop.6). For the sake of brevity, in what follows i translate ναοycrp .6 with phrases like ' empirical reasoning ', ' empirical calculation ', although a more accurate expression would be some thing like 'reasoning based on empirical data '
- - ' nevertheless, since nothing is in itself universally commendable or blameworthy, but becomes commendable insofar as it conforms to 'the end of the good, and blameworthy insofar as it conforms to the end of the bad, the man who has not by an empirical calculation obtained this knowledge will not be able to use it as a standard of reference for analysing that which is under consideration for commendation .. . ".
- ' some epicureans are said to employ, as evidence that poverty is an evil, empirical arguments of the following kind: epicurus says that poverty is an evil for many reasons, but especially because it is unendurable when combined with these other afflictions (sc. D-c uxat r; ; ?) ... '.
- - similarly in the de ira philodemus quotes three arguments which he believes prove that a moderate degree of anger is permissible in a wise man. He terms them bn), οytr p. O 184 or α6yc. T bnaoytr 'cvx. O 185 and once again they take the form of appeals to experience: the first 186 argues from the fact that wise men are grateful for good turns; the second 187 from the fact that even wise men get -drunk; and the third,188 if i have understood it correctly, from the fact that people are only angered by what they already believe to be had, however enraged they may become.
- Diogenes of oenoanda tells us that for most people the superiority of mental to physical feelings is- hard to appreciate by ετταοytrct j-6t; ; 195 because they never occur

- simultaneously in their most intense forms and direct comparison is therefore impossible.
- - philodemus, 208 defending the epicurean method of analogical inference against the stoic objection that some arguments by analogy patently do not work, replies that one cannot make inferences about the invisible from chance similarities in the visible world, but only from similarities which occur with total consistency throughout the whole range of our experience. It is invalid to argue that because there are figs within our experience there must be figs outside it, for our knowledge of the world tells us that vegetation varies from region to region. Thus the stoic argument is ' easily refuted, contradicted by the facts, and not even based on empirical study of the actual similarities and differences that exist in the things which we perceive ':
 - - [philodemus] ' for there are certain cases where the method by similarity is not always admissible; and we make a proper empirical study of similarities, since it is wrong to make inferences about simply anything on the basis of chance common properties. " later 211 he rejects the stoic claim that the existence of a similarity (e. G. That in respect of mortality all men resemble men within our experience) can only be affirmed in the conclusion of an argument if it is also stated among its premises, and explains": through empirical assessment of phenomena i shall reach the conclusion that similarity must exist also in this respect. For since men in our experience possess this characteristic, i shall deem all men in general to hold it, by concluding through empirical reasoning that also in this respect similarity must exist '.
 - - ' the man who infers correctly will, insofar as things which lie beyond our perception are different, allow them to be different ; nor, insofar as they resemble what we perceive, will he deny them this resemblance '.
 - - ' therefore in respect of some characteristics the man who makes the correct empirical. Assessment will grant differences from what we perceive, but in respect of others, without which the very nature of fire is inconceivable, he will maintain the resemblance to what we perceive'.

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2023 at 10:13 AM

The chain of reasoning being discussed in this thread allows me to state my issues with the "tetrapharmakon" and "the katastematic-kinetic" distinction with greater clarity.

Once you accept the premise that whatever is not painful is pleasurable (or any of the other ways of phrasing it by the various translators), you have a premise that is as unalterable and important as saying "nothing exists except atoms and void." You take that premise all the way to the end, and you never allow any deviation from its implications. The final result is that you unalterably take the position that if you are alive and experiencing anything, what you are

experiencing is pleasure unless you experience it as pain. You can string as many "What about X?" questions as you like for an eternity, and you will never find an example of something that is desirable in itself which does not fall under the umbrella of the term "pleasure." The height of pleasure is then easy to understand as 100% pleasure and 0% pain. This is the approach that we see in Torquatus in On Ends.

Nothing in the letter to Menoeceus contradicts this. Considered in combination with PDO3, which everyone also accepts to be authentic Epicurus, the interpretation asserted by Torquatus is visible in Menoeceus as well. No doubt the same view was stated by Epicurus many times in texts we no longer have, but thanks to Cicero's Torquatus we have the proposition stated clearly in unmistakable terms. Epicurean ethics makes no sense unless all types of pleasure - mental and physical - are included under the umbrella of pleasure, and no presentation of Epicurean philosophy is complete without emphasizing this point.

One problem with the tetrapharmakon is that "What is good is easy to get" conveys none of this. Even if we take a charitable view that this is a down-the-line conclusion for those who understand the chain of reasoning that gets you there, the layman is simply not going to understand this. The layman is legitimately going to conclude that Epicurus has some weird definition of "the good" that defies the layman's own understanding of what a struggle is generally involved in life. More likely, and worse when combined with "What is terrible is easy to endure" (I am using the Wikipedia versions that the vast majority of the world is seeing), the layman is going to dismiss Epicurus as hopelessly out of touch with reality.

And even if the layman perseveres past the tetrapharmakon and decides to study further, what is he to think when he is confronted with the endless debating over the "katastematic-kinetic" distinction? What is he to understand from the refusal to translate these terms into the understandable language he speaks today? The whole key to understanding involves explaining that the normal state of life without pain should justly be considered pleasurable. Fixation on untranslated Greek words like "katastematic" or "ataraxia" are treated so mysteriously that the reasonable layman is going to be bewildered. Most of them are going to carry forward their preexisting understanding of the word "pleasure" as limited to "stimulation of the senses," and they are going to conclude that Epicurus has put his finger on some kind of esoteric stimulation of the senses that is so otherworldly that only an ancient Greek can understand it accurately. Yes, some people (primarily academics), find the contemplation of this mystery to be entertaining, but the reasonable layman is not going to think so, and he is going to fully discard Epicurus at that point.

In contrast I would say that Cicero and Cassius Longinus were both correct: Epicurean philosophy in its broad outline is easy to understand. No, there are no supernatural gods telling us what to do. No, there are no ideal forms or essences that tell us what to do. Instead, Nature shows us through the feelings of pleasure and pain what is desirable and what is not. Nature does not give us a fully formed mind, however, and it is up to us to learn to understand that life itself in all its non-painful experiences is pleasurable, and that unless we are suffering some

specific pain then we are experiencing pleasure. The wise man will then understand that he has access to all sorts of pleasures, some mental and some physical, that are attainable in all but the most extreme situations of life. While all of these pleasures feel good, the wise man will decide which pleasures to pursue and which to avoid by evaluating the full result of his actions. When all non-painful experiences are placed in the balance of life against the painful experiences, the wise man will see that pleasures can readily be made to predominate over pain, and thus a life of continuous pleasure is possible. Pleasure is not limited only to the rich or fortunate whose circumstances allow them access to luxury and thrills most of their lives, but it remains a valid framework by which even the poor and less fortunate can organize their lives.

The observation that the highest pleasure is experienced when all pain is gone is simply an obvious result of the first premise that the sum total of pleasure is measurable by the absence of pain. If you identify the goal of your life as "Pleasure," and you understand that everything that is not painful is pleasurable, you can never heighten the experience of pleasure no matter how many extra years you might live. Time is always desirable, but the extra pleasure obtained through extra time is just a variation of the pleasures already experienced, and the extra time does not improve the perspective that pleasure cannot be improved once all pain is gone. This also is not to say that you should limit yourself to simple pleasures or pleasures of the mind, but only that when you are evaluating a goal for your life, it is conceptually and understandably valid for everyone to see that in the broadest terms, a life from which all pain is eliminated as a way of measuring the ultimate goal, whether you are an oyster or a cow or a sailor or a general or a philosopher.

None of this is conveyed to laymen by repeating "what's good is easy to get" or stating something like "Epicurus held katastematic / restful / stable / abiding pleasure to be the authentic type of pleasure which is the true goal of life." When academics focus on stating those propositions over, the result may be an increase of their reputation among their academic peers, but they not only fail to bring healing but in fact drive away the legions of ordinary people who would otherwise benefit from Epicurean philosophy.

Post by "Don" of October 3, 2023 at 11:37 AM

You raise some valid points, Cassius; but...(you knew that was coming 😊)

I agree that *leading* with the Tetracharmakos or discussion of kinetic/katastematic categories for the general reader is not the best route. I also agree that those are what get played up by many popular resources (read: Wikipedia, Reddit, etc) as well as academic discussions. They appear many times to also be interpreted through a Stoic/Platonic/Buddhist lens which colors the discussion as well out there in the world.

Problematic? Without a doubt.

That said...

The Tetrpharmakos is an authentic memory aide used by ancient Epicureans and documented by a classical Epicurean scholar . That's rare and I'm never going to advocate getting rid of it or burying it because some people misunderstand or misuse it. I've used it myself when I'm sick to remind me pain is fleeting. I also get frustrated by bad translations of it too. Whether Philodemus was approving of it or not is also up for debate, but there's no doubt Epicureans were using it. Having that connection to the ancient school is priceless as far as I'm concerned.

As for kinetic/katastematic pleasure, that's a way of thinking about the breadth of pleasure available to us as necessary and natural help us think about desires available to us. Is k/k discussion good for beginners? No, not necessarily. Is it a favorite academic rabbit hole. Absolutely, because you can read all kinds of things into it and open it up for various (incorrect, in my mind) interpretations. I still think it's a valuable distinction for many reasons, but it needs to be in context, which is often missing.

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2023 at 12:01 PM

I think Don and I are largely in agreement with the exception of this point in dispute:

[Quote from Don](#)

The Tetrpharmakos is an authentic memory aide used by ancient Epicureans and documented by a classical Epicurean scholar .

I do not agree that the contextual evidence we have supports this conclusion. The fragmentary nature of the text in which this is preserved (issues which we have posted about at length [here](#) and [here](#) and in many other threads) in a work in which Philodemus is complaining about Epicureans who do not pay sufficient attention to the texts is good reason in my view to question the authenticity of this as an accurate statement of Epicurean doctrine. Only if additional parts of this scroll are deciphered which allow us to know for sure what Philodemus had in mind (if indeed the transcribers who examined the original even transcribed it correctly) would I expect to change my view on that. My view is that if it in fact does appear in the text in the way it is translated - and for now I concede it does - I think the odds are at least as great that Philodemus was being critical of it rather than supportive.

Instead, I would say that I think a lot of the issues I complain about arise from a natural sequence of events spanning 2000 years after the Epicurean texts and teachers faded away.

Rather than meaning to complain about anybody else's interpretations, I mean the thrust of my point to be this:

Consideration of all non-painful experiences to be pleasurable is so foreign to the most way people think that virtually no one is going to understand this unless you hit them in the face with a proverbial 2x4. Unless this sweeping view of pleasure as the default is explained clearly, most everyone is going to presume that like some religious cultist Epicurus is peddling some hitherto-undiscovered type of pleasure. Maybe I alone have been misreading the commentaries of the last 50 years, but my take-away from most all of them is that they agree with the academic consensus that Epicurus is talking about some weird kind of pleasure involving asceticism that makes little sense to anyone is not dedicating their lives to fleeing from the pains of the world.

My preferred interpretation at this point is not that Epicurus discovered some new type of pleasure, but he instead developed a new way of looking at all experiences of life as inherently pleasurable whenever those experiences are not painful. This re-identification makes it easy to understand the references to absence of pain being the highest pleasure, because it's just the same kind of viewpoint as contrasting atoms and void. Our lives are full of atoms of pleasure, interrupted by voids of pain, and our goal is to gather together in our lives as many atoms of pleasure together uninterrupted by pains as we can. The two - atoms and void / pleasure and pain - coexist but never lose their natures. Where you have one you have the other, and vice versa, but nothing else exists to make up the experiences of life other than pain and pleasure. Once you see what he is doing, everything else falls into place. When you once see the picture you can't "un-see" it, but until you do see it you can stare at the picture for years on end and you'll keep looking in vain for some kind of mysterious pleasure that you will never find because it isn't there.

The rest of any disagreement that Don and I have is reconcilable by my agreement that the tetracharmakon and katastematic/kinetic discussions do in the end prove useful to those who are willing to really dig into the question. Without something like them to get you started you lose scent of the track of explaining the non-standard view of pleasure stated in the Letter to Menoeceus. I don't see the tetracharmakon as the kind of memory aid that I would advocate anyone using, because I don't want anyone to think that I consider their troubles to be easy to endure, or their legitimate desires in life to be easy to get. But as it is the tetracharmakon does stir emotions in us, sort of like "[death is nothing to us](#)" is an in your face formulation, and it does get people talking. And that's a good thing.

Post by “Don” of October 3, 2023 at 12:27 PM

For reference from previous threads:

Thread

[Best Source For Analysis of Surviving Portions of Philodemus On / Against __ ?? __ - PHerc 1005](#)

As best I can tell as I type this we don't have a good source for a translation of surviving fragments of this work, and analysis of what the work is about. Please post suggestions for that in this thread. Thanks!



Cassius

December 12, 2020 at 9:08 AM

Thread

[The Tetrpharmakon - Sound Epicurean Doctrine, or Oversimplification?](#)

[Admin note: This discussion began as a response by Don to a comment made by Charles in this Lucretius Today podcast thread: [RE: Episode Forty-Seven - Death is Nothing To Us](#) . It deserves to stand alone, so was cut from there and placed here. The thread now shows as started by Godfrey due to the way it was moved, but this post by Don was in fact the thread-starter.]

In light of this week's episode, I have to stand up for the Tetrpharmakos. I don't expect to change Charles's mind 😊 but I...



Don

December 6, 2020 at 7:09 PM

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2023 at 12:42 PM

I should add to the mix of issues that we are discussing that I do not agree that it is a correct statement to say that Epicurus thinks the greatest pleasure is tranquility, or that it is a correct statement that the ultimate goal of life is tranquility.

In both cases I think the correct statement is to keep the focus on pleasure:

The greatest pleasure (the limit of pleasure) is not tranquility, but the experience of 100% pleasure and 0% pain, which means the total absence of any painful experiences, as stated in [PD03](#),

and

The ultimate goal of life (the highest good) is not Tranquility, but Pleasure, which is as stated by Torquatus in the opening of his defense of Epicurus.

Post by “Don” of October 3, 2023 at 12:48 PM

Just to provoke Cassius (in the friendliest way possible), I continue to maintain that Epicurus taught that ataraxia (translated as one wishes: tranquility, calm, a mind free from disturbance, etc) is necessary but not sufficient alone for living a pleasurable life, described as eudaimonia.

There, I got *two* untranslated Greek words in there in one post 😊

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2023 at 1:08 PM

Those cause me no disturbance at all! 😊

How can you be at 100% pleasure if you are still anxious about something? So I agree with that!

But the goal is not simply to be tranquil, the goal is rather to combine tranquility with other pleasures of mind and body to come as close to a life of 100% pleasure as I can. This would include those mental activities where we are well pleased that we are not subject to the shipwrecks of those who fear death and hell and the gods, and where we also engage in other such bodily and mental activities as bring more pleasure than pain.

I can readily recognize that the "perfect" would be a life of 100% pleasure, while at the same time "the good enough" for me that is within my capacity would be a life in which pleasure predominates, even in those rare times when i am required to be conversant in Greek! 😊