

Episode 204 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 12 - More On The "Jurisdiction" Question

Post by "Cassius" of December 2, 2023 at 6:32 AM

Welcome to Episode 204 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 Book Two of Cicero's On Ends, which are largely devoted Cicero's attack on 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.

Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#). Check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

This week we move on through Section XIII, starting roughly here:

... Well, this is directed against Aristippus, who accounts that pleasure which all of us alone call pleasure, to be not only the highest but the only form of pleasure; while your school holds different doctrine. But he, as I have said, is in fault; since neither the shape of the human body nor reason, preeminent among man's mental endowments, gives any indication that man came into existence for the sole purpose of enjoying pleasures. Nor indeed must we listen to Hieronymus, whose supreme good is the same as that on which your school sometimes or rather very often insists, absence of pain. For if pain is an evil it does not follow that to be free from that evil suffices to produce the life of happiness. Let Ennius rather speak thus: he has a vast amount of good who has no ill; let us estimate happiness not by the banishment of evil, but by the acquisition of good, and let us not seek this in inactivity, whether of a joyous kind, like that of Aristippus, or marked by absence of pain, like that of our philosopher, but in action of some sort and reflection. Now these arguments may be advanced in the same form against the Carneadean view of the supreme good, though he proposed it not so much with the purpose of securing approval as with the intention of combating the Stoics, against whom he waged war; his supreme good is however of such a nature that when joined to virtue it seems likely to exert influence and to furnish forth abundantly the life of happiness, with which subject

our whole inquiry is concerned. Those indeed who join to virtue either pleasure, the thing of all others which virtue holds in least esteem, or the absence of pain, which though it is unassociated with evil, still is not the supreme good, make an addition which is not very plausible, yet I do not understand why they should carry out the idea in such a niggardly and narrow manner. For, as though they had to pay for anything which they join with virtue, they in the first place unite with her the cheapest articles, next they would rather add things singly than combine with morality all those objects to which nature had primarily given her sanction. And because these objects were held worthless by Pyrrho and Aristo, so that they said there was absolutely no distinction of value between the best possible health and the most serious illness, people have quite rightly ceased long ago to argue against these philosophers. For by determining that on virtue alone everything so entirely depends, that they robbed her of free selection from among these objects, and allowed her neither starting point nor foothold, they abolished that very virtue of which they were enamoured. Erillus again by assigning all importance to knowledge, kept in view a single kind of good, but not the best kind nor one by whose aid life can possibly be steered. So he too was long ago cast into oblivion, for since the time of Chrysippus there have certainly been no discussions about him.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57956344>

Post by “Cassius” of December 6, 2023 at 4:44 PM

As per some comments in the thread for Episode 203, in 204 we return to the discussion of whether it was accurate of Cicero to allege that Epicurus relied **solely** on the senses for his deduction that pleasure is the highest good.

Joshua points out in this current episode that what Torquatus really said in book one was (note the underlining):

Quote

IX. I will start then in the manner approved by the author of the system himself, by settling what are the essence and qualities of the thing that is the object of our inquiry; not that I suppose you to be ignorant of it, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil. This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in

it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict.

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature.

What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance? Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain.

Based on the underlined parts I think we have a clear line that "the senses alone" are not really the end of the story for Epicurus. Here's a couple of questions;

1. What does "at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict" really mean? Isn't it a given of Epicurean theory of the senses that the senses themselves simply report what they receive 'without evaluation'? Well, isn't deciding whether something is pleasing or painful an "evaluation" of at least a sort?
2. "For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident." -
 1. Doesn't both "notice" and especially "reminder" indicate something more than a present sense impression? "Reminder" seems to evoke memory, and if I recall correctly somewhere else it is stated that the senses themselves have no memory.

3. The line "as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them" contains at least two relevant aspects:
 1. Aren't "hot," "white," and "sweet" evaluations of a sort? Certainly those terms as words are concepts.
 2. Isn't drawing "attention" to them something that involves more than just the operation of the senses?
4. "Can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason" might not be a reference to a logical proof, but the action of the consciousness to grasp something that involves prolepsis or whatever the separate faculty of pleasure/pain really is.
5. "Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a "notion" "naturally implanted in our minds."
 1. This phrasing ("notion" and "naturally implanted") seems pretty clearly to evoke the likelihood that prolepsis is involved.

Now this last item 5 seems to belong to a list that Torquatus is not attributing to Epicurus himself, but I think that there's ample reason even in what Torquatus has said to think that Cicero was overstating his case to say that Epicurus was relying **only** on the five senses.

We didn't spend an overly long amount of time talking about this but I think it's an important point worth further thought.

Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2023 at 7:10 PM

Episode 204 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57956344>

Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2023 at 7:13 PM

Here is a link to the Pie Chart Presentation mentioned in the episode:

Thread

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3562-episode-204-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-12-more-on-the-jurisdiction-question/>

[A Draft of A Pie Chart Presentation of Basic Concepts In Epicurean Pleasure](#)

I took a detour from editing the podcast because I have been wanting to put together a presentation on pleasure using a pie chart format.

Here's a first draft of that. Not nearly what it should be, but maybe it will inspire someone to do better:

Please turn on close captions for best effect.

youtu.be/dTjFycUd3L4



Cassius

November 30, 2023 at 2:21 PM

Post by “Don” of December 9, 2023 at 12:44 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Well, isn't deciding whether something is pleasing or painful an "evaluation" of at least a sort?

I don't think so. Pleasure and pain have an automatic component to them. For example:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007091219302387>

Quote

Pain is recognized to have both a sensory dimension (intensity) and an affective dimension (unpleasantness). Pain feels like a single unpleasant bodily experience, but investigations of human pain have long considered these two dimensions of pain to be separable and differentially modifiable.

There's also this paper: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4425246/>

That first paper talks about the sensory component of pain and then the "affective" dimension - the "feeling" of pleasantness or unpleasantness that follows (what seems like simultaneously). It seems to me that there is a sensory stimulus - if pain, touching a hot rack in the oven - our

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brains have predicted that we're if we experience damage to our hand if we let it in this spot, and immediately - automatically - pulls it away. Almost, but not quite, the "feeling" of displeasure is associated with that stimulus. THEN we can think cognitively *after* that that "I need to never do that again! That hurts! That's certainly not good!" We put a *value* judgement on the act - on the feeling - after we experience the sensory input and the pain in quick succession. Then we can cognitively think about "How stupid!" and all kinds of other thoughts.

Post by “waterholic” of December 9, 2023 at 3:47 AM

Big thanks to all, especially liked the insights from [Joshua](#) on the childish reasoning error of Cicero: there is a purpose for us to be here and pleasure cannot be it, because ... it cannot. How far does his reason take him if he fails to consider that perhaps we weren't placed here and there was no purpose?