

Episode 216 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 23 - Why Does Epicurus Say Length Of Time Does Not Contribute To Pleasure?

Post by "Cassius" of February 24, 2024 at 3:03 PM

Welcome to Episode 216 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most 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 is largely devoted Cicero's attack on Epicurean Philosophy. 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 pick up after devoting an episode to Happiness to where the discussion continued in Book 2 at the very end of Section XXVII, continuing into Section XXVIII:

REID EDITION

XXVII. ... On bodily pleasure (I will add mental, if you like, on the understanding that it also springs, as you believe, from the body) depends the life of happiness. Well, who can guarantee the wise man that this pleasure will be permanent? For the circumstances that give rise to pleasures are not within the control of the wise man, since your happiness is not dependent on wisdom herself, but on the objects which wisdom procures with a view to pleasure. Now all such objects are external to us, and what is external is in the power of chance. Thus fortune becomes lady paramount over happiness, though Epicurus says she to a small extent only crosses the path of the wise man.

XXVIII. Come, you will say to me, these are small matters. The wise man is enriched by nature herself, whose wealth, as Epicurus has taught us, is easily procured. His statements are good, and I do not attack them, but they are inconsistent with each other. He declares that no less pleasure is derived from the poorest sustenance, or rather from the most despicable kinds of

food and drink, than from the most recherché dishes of the banquet. If he declared that it made no difference to happiness what kind of food he lived on, I should yield him the point and even applaud him ; for he would be asserting the strict truth, and I listen when Socrates, who holds pleasure in no esteem, affirms that hunger is the proper seasoning for food, and thirst for drink. But to one who, judging of everything by pleasure, lives like Gallonius, but talks like the old Piso Frugi, I do not listen, nor do I believe that he says what he thinks. He announced that nature's wealth is easily procurable, because nature is satisfied with little. This would be true, if you did not value pleasure so highly. The pleasure, he says, that is obtained from the cheapest things is not inferior to that which is got from the most costly. To say this is to be destitute not merely of intelligence, but even of a palate. Truly those who disregard pleasure itself are free to say that they do not prefer a sturgeon 'to a sprat; but he who places his supreme good in pleasure must judge of everything by sense and not by reason, and must say that those things are best which are most tasty. But let that pass; let us suppose he acquires the intensest pleasures not merely at small cost, but at no cost at all, so far as I am concerned; let the pleasure given by the cress which the Persians used to eat, as Xenophon writes, be no less than that afforded by the banquets of Syracuse, which are severely blamed by Plato; let the acquisition of pleasure be as easy, I say, as you make it out to be; still what are we to say about pain? Its agonies are so great that a life surrounded by them cannot be happy, if only pain is the greatest of evils. Why, Metrodorus himself, who is almost a second Epicurus, sketches happiness almost in these words; a well regulated condition of body, accompanied by the assurance that it will continue so. Can any one possibly be assured as to the state of this body of his, I do not say in a year's time, but by the time evening comes? Pain then, that is to say the greatest of evils, will always be an object of dread, even though it be not present, for it may present itself at any moment. How then can the dread of the greatest possible evil consort with the life of happiness? Someone tells me: Epicurus imparts to us a scheme which will enable us to pay no heed to pain. To begin with, the thing is in itself ridiculous, that no attention should be given to the greatest of evils. But pray what is his scheme? The greatest pain, he says, is short. First, what do you mean by short? Next, what by the greatest pain? May the greatest pain not continue for some days? Look to it, that it may not continue some months even! Unless possibly you refer to the kind of pain which is fatal as soon as it seizes any one. Who dreads such pain as that? I wish rather you would alleviate that other sort, under which I saw that most excellent and most cultivated gentleman, my friend Gnaeus Octavius, son of Marcus, wasting away, and not on one occasion only or for a short time, but often and over quite a long period. What tortures did he endure, ye eternal gods, when all his limbs seemed on fire! Yet for all that we did not regard him as wretched, but only as distressed, for pain was not to him the greatest of evils. But he would have been wretched, if he had been immersed in pleasures, while his life was scandalous and wicked.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58842297>

Post by “Cassius” of February 25, 2024 at 12:23 PM

Today Cicero hit the panel with one of the toughest questions in Epicurean philosophy, summarized in one way as: "If a life of pleasure is the good, why isn't a longer life of pleasure better than a shorter life of pleasure?"

We struggled through some initial thoughts, which I will get edited and posted as soon as I can. However this question will be extended throughout the next several episodes, so we will have an opportunity to grapple with this key issue.

Here is the heart of Cicero's argument:

But I shall be reminded (as you said yourself) that Epicurus will not admit that continuance of time contributes anything to happiness, or that less pleasure is realized in a short period of time than if the pleasure were eternal. These statements are most inconsistent ; for while he places his supreme good in pleasure, he refuses to allow that pleasure can reach a greater height in a life of boundless extent, than in one limited and moderate in length. He who places good entirely in virtue can say that happiness is consummated by the consummation of virtue, since he denies that time brings additions to his supreme good; but when a man supposes that happiness is caused by pleasure, how are his doctrines to be reconciled, if he means to affirm that pleasure is not heightened by duration? In that case, neither is pain. Or, though all the most enduring pains are also the most wretched, does length of time not render pleasure more enviable? What reason then has Epicurus for calling a god, as he does, both happy and eternal? If you take away his eternity, Jupiter will be not a whit happier than Epicurus, since both of them are in the enjoyment of the supreme good, which is pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of February 26, 2024 at 4:44 PM

I don't want to raise any expectations that this is going to be a particularly "good" episode, but I do think it will cover some "important topics."

Two of them deserve threads of their own:

Thread

If We Agree For The Sake of Argument That "The Perfect Should Not Be The Enemy of The Good," then let's ask "What *Should* We Consider To Be The Proper Relationship Between The Perfect And The Good?"

This thread is to discuss the question in the title.

It seems to me that this aphorism, which most of us seem to agree is a good one, needs to be followed up with more explanation of what exactly *is* the proper way for us to view the "perfect" in relationship to "the good?"

Let's also presume that we don't immediately jump to the reductionist "there is no perfect" and "there is no good," although that may be a perfectly reasonable option that we can include in the discussion.

Presuming we are...



Cassius

February 26, 2024 at 4:43 PM

Post

RE: Given The Stress That Many Greek Philosophers' Placed On "Virtue" or a perfect view of "The Good" As The Ultimate Goal, To What Extent Would An Epicurus Have Considered That Approach An "Unnatural and Unnecessary Desire?"

[...]

Yes that is exactly the direction I would take this. And to the extent that Epicurus might have been saying this in the context of deep philosophical discussion, such as the letter to Menoeceus, rather than in the context of a "here's how you should choose your career" discussion, then the target of these comments might have been at least as much his philosophical opponents as it was those who couldn't control their urges for sex or food.



Cassius

February 26, 2024 at 6:45 PM

Post by "Cassius" of February 26, 2024 at 6:46 PM

This is a shorter note: Around the 36 minute mark will appear Joshua explaining the origin of "discretion is the better part of valor." I never thought of that in an Epicurean context before, but now that I do think about it, it's the kind of comment that goes right to the Epicurean perspective on the proper use of *any* virtue.

We don't discuss it for long, and Joshua makes the point that Falstaff wasn't necessarily right in a way that would apply to all circumstances, but it's interesting to think about how the quote applies to the contextual analysis of virtue.

Post by "Cassius" of February 26, 2024 at 6:57 PM

Referring over to the new thread on the perfect not being the enemy of the good, especially as to a comment Pacatus made, I wish I could put a slightly different spin on my comments in the episode in particular and on some of my past comments on "idealism" in general.

As some are pointing out there, an "ideal" can certainly have a beneficial use, so it's going to be necessary to be clear what we mean in attacking "idealism." Some people already refer to the Epicurean view of the gods as an "idealist" view, and even though i think Epicurus held his gods to be real too, I've always tried to maintain that in addition to their reality, they serve as an example of an "ideal" life that helps us target ours.

So part of the issue with "idealism" that needs stressing is that there's nothing wrong with having and using "ideals," but you darn better be sure that you generate your ideals through the sensations, anticipations, and feelings, and that you don't let your "syllogistic logic" run unrestrained and create totally "unreal" ideals that are **in fact** the enemy of "the good."

The point in the episode i am referring to is where I say that the error of plato et al was in idealizing virtue as an absolute form in another dimension. That's the part I think is the heart of the issue, not that they are "idealizing virtue" by generating a realistic picture, that would in fact be useful, as Epicurus does, but that they are departing from the senses, anticipations, and feeling by creating an abstracted incorrect ideal that is unreal and can never be real and is in fact harmful to the realistic ideal (a direct parallel to what the crowd does in creating false anticipations of the *gods*.)

Post by “Cassius” of February 26, 2024 at 8:10 PM

Gonna be out soon later tonight, but one comment first - as sometimes is the case you may need a dictionary for some of Joshua's comments -- unless you are familiar with the word "mickle" already! 😊

Post by “Joshua” of February 26, 2024 at 9:07 PM

Ha! Funny story about that word; when J. R. R. Tolkien was giving names to the towns in the Shire, he wanted to call a small hamlet 'Michel Delving', '*little digging*'. He later learned that the word Michel (or Old English Micel) actually meant *great* and not *little*, so he made Michel Delving (*Great Digging*) the largest town in the Shire, and the seat of the hobbits' government, such as it was. Michel passed into modern English as mickle, which is how it came to be used by William Shakespeare.

If a philologist is getting these words mixed up, you know you've found your way to an odd part of the dictionary.

Post by “Cassius” of February 26, 2024 at 9:14 PM

Episode 216 of the Lucretius Today Podcast Is Now Available. Today we address an important but frequently questioned doctrine of Epicurus - Why did he seem to say that length of time does not contribute to pleasure? ([PD19](#). Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.)

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58842297>

Post by “Titus” of February 28, 2024 at 11:39 AM

In this episode I learnt that I don't have to listen to the approximately 200 episodes I've missed so far to experience the maximum of this pleasurable podcast 😊

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3728-episode-216-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-23-why-does-epicurus-say-length-of-ti/>

Post by “Cassius” of February 28, 2024 at 12:14 PM

[Quote from Titus](#)

In this episode I learnt that I don't have to listen to the approximately 200 episodes I've missed so far to experience the maximum of this pleasurable podcast 😊

You don't have to listen to the old episodes to experience "maximum pleasure" from the podcast, but since he who counsels the old man to make a good end is foolish ... because of the desirability of life, and also because ... much worse still is the man who says it is good not to be born but *'once born make haste to pass the gates of Death'*.... it will be pleasant and desirable also if you end up having the time to listen to the previous 200!

Post by “Cassius” of February 28, 2024 at 12:53 PM

I posted this following quote over in another recent thread but it also belongs here. I am strongly dissatisfied with how hard it seems to be to balance this time issue in many of our discussions. Yes, it's not necessary to live a longer time in order to experience "complete pleasure," because once you are complete it never gets more complete. But if life is desirable, as Epicurus also says, then "living" contains a time element, and so a longer pleasant life is still more desirable than a shorter pleasant life, even though the pleasure never gets more "complete," it only varies.

Both are true - the pleasure never gets more complete, but a longer time is also desirable. This language in Menoeceus needs to be parsed closely: "And just as with food he does not seek **simply** the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant." I will leave it to the Greek experts to expound on the Greek, but to be consistent with the rest of what he is saying it seems to me that Epicurus has to be saying that both points are true -- length of time experiencing pleasure is in fact an aspect of experiencing pleasure (it is one among many, but the three primary are time, intensity, and part of the organism involved, per [PD09](#)), but another aspect of experiencing pleasure is that once you experience "complete" pleasure then pleasure never gets more "complete."

We're seeing in many discussions strong implication that length of time is not relevant to pleasure at all, and to me that would be like saying that manner of death or time of death is not

relevant at all. That's patently not true - it is preferable to die a painless death rather than painful death, and it is preferable to live a longer happy life than a shorter happy life.

The need to work further on expressing this better, including finding the sources that explain the warped Stoic view that Lucian is ridiculing here, and this is a much more important issue than many that we often discuss.

[Quote from Lucian's Hermotimus](#)

Lycinus. You must be of good cheer and keep a stout heart; gaze at the end of your climb and the Happiness at the top, and remember that he is working with you. What prospect does he hold out? when are you to be up? does he think you will be on the top next year—by the Great Mysteries, or the Panathenaea, say?

Hermotimus. Too soon, Lycinus.

Lycinus. By next Olympiad, then?

Hermotimus. All too short a time, even that, for habituation to Virtue and attainment of Happiness.

Lycinus. Say two Olympiads, then, for an outside estimate. You may fairly be found guilty of laziness, if you cannot get it done by then; the time would allow you three return trips from the Pillars of Heracles to India, with a margin for exploring the tribes on the way instead of sailing straight and never stopping. How much higher and more slippery, pray, is the peak on which your Virtue dwells than that Aornos crag which Alexander stormed in a few days?

Hermotimus. There is no resemblance, Lycinus; this is not a thing, as you conceive it, to be compassed and captured quickly, though ten thousand Alexanders were to assault it; in that case, the sealers would have been legion. As it is, a good number begin the climb with great confidence, and do make progress, some very little indeed, others more; but when they get half-way, they find endless difficulties and discomforts, lose heart, and turn back, panting, dripping, and exhausted. But those who endure to the end reach the top, to be blessed thenceforth with wondrous days, looking down from their height upon the ants which are the rest of mankind.

Lycinus. Dear me, what tiny things you make us out—not so big as the Pygmies even, but positively groveling on the face of the earth. I quite understand it; your thoughts are up aloft already. And we, the common men that walk the earth, shall mingle you with the Gods in our prayers; for you are translated above the clouds, and gone up whither you have so long striven.

Hermotimus. If but that ascent might be, Lycinus! but it is far yet.

Lycinus. But you have never told me how far, in terms of time.

Hermotimus. No; for I know not precisely myself. My guess is that it will not be more than twenty years; by that time I shall surely be on the summit.

Lycinus. Mercy upon us, you take long views!

Hermotimus. Ay; but, as the toil, so is the reward.

Lycinus. That may be; but about these twenty years—have you your master's promise that you will live so long? Is he prophet as well as philosopher? Or is it a soothsayer or Chaldean expert that you trust? Such things are known to them, I understand. You would never, of course, if there were any uncertainty of your life's lasting to the Virtue-point, slave and toil night and day like this; why, just as you were close to the top, your fate might come upon you, lay hold of you by the heel, and lug you down with your hopes unfulfilled.

Hermotimus. God forbid! these are words of ill omen, Lycinus; may life be granted me, that I may grow wise, and have if it be but one day of Happiness!

Lycinus. For all these toils will you be content with your one day?

Hermotimus. Content? Yes, or with the briefest moment of it.

Lycinus. But is there indeed Happiness up there—and worth all the pains? How can you tell? You have never been up yourself.

Hermotimus. I trust my master's word; and he knows well; is he not on the topmost height?

Lycinus. Oh, do tell me what he says about it; what is Happiness like? wealth, glory, pleasures incomparable?

Display More

Post by “Godfrey” of February 28, 2024 at 3:47 PM

Excellent discussion of the issue in the podcast! One thing that you discussed (maybe not explicitly) which I think is key, is that the argument of limited v unlimited time is in many ways a matter of materialism v idealism.

In the materialist view a lifespan is limited. In the idealist view there may be a soul which exists for an unlimited time. This to me is the sticking point with Cicero (who I would call a strident idealist). For an Epicurean it's somewhat ludicrous to discuss pleasure without the limit of time, since a limited lifespan is inherent in being alive.

In the same vein, virtue and similar concepts are strictly that: *concepts*. They are idealist, not materialist. Being untethered to physical reality, they can extend forever or do whatever else one wants them to do: they're all imaginary. Epicurean pleasure, on the other hand, is strictly material. It's a real, physical element of living creatures, not an idealist concept.

So one's goal is to prudently maximize one's pleasure, which is limited by one's lifespan. Cicero's argument is about the larger issue of materialism v idealism.

Post by “Cassius” of February 28, 2024 at 4:27 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

So one's goal is to prudently maximize one's pleasure, which is limited by one's lifespan. Cicero's argument is about the larger issue of materialism v idealism.

I think this is a helpful direction, Godfrey, but I think it will need further explanation to be clearly understandable.

Is Epicurus in fact saying that a longer life is not more pleasant than a shorter life, or is he only comparing the limited human span (whatever it is) to an unlimited span? Cicero is arguing that Epicurus said that length of time adds nothing to pleasure. Did Epicurus in fact say that? If that is the case, then the position applies to no matter how long or short that the human life is, not just that it is "limited." If complete pleasure can be experienced the first day we are born, and nothing more is needed and we are indifferent to living longer, than we should say so explicitly. I do not think that is what Epicurus meant.

As to materialism vs idealism, I suppose I am not sure that materialism is the opposite of idealism. Maybe it's the opposite of spiritualism or supernaturalism, but is "idealism" the same thing as those two? Were the Stoics really that obtuse as to think that there is something called "virtue" that if grasped only for a moment is all that one needs to be satisfied? It seems they said so, but I don't think we can clearly discuss what they were saying without more reference material / citations that establish what they were thinking.

As we asked in the episode, is it not clear to anyone that it would be "better" to be virtuous for a year than for a day? Maybe the question is defining "better," but if some limited or special

definition of "better" is the issue, then we need to know what that is so that we can see if Epicurus was applying that same definition to pleasure.

This is a good time to try to hash through some of these questions so we can add a substantive entry to the FAQ and/or other places on the website, because I don't think we are anywhere close to a persuasive explanation of what Epicurus was really saying.

Of course I invite anyone to propose a full statement reconciling these issues including the contrast with the Stoics! 😊

Post by "Cassius" of February 28, 2024 at 4:43 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

is in many ways a matter of materialism v idealism.

Another point:

While I personally am quick to throw around the "materialism" vs "idealism" contrast, I think we need to be clear what it means. Epicurus doesn't hold that things need to be "material" in order to be felt -- he says mental feelings are stronger than physical ones. So "idealism" can certainly cause pleasure and pain, I would presume, and that makes idealism at least as "real" as dreams in that idealism can affect us.

This gets blurry as well in asking "are we talking about concepts vs things that have a material existence?"

I think we need to be clear in what respect saying that something is "idealism" means something. "Capitalism" and "communism" may not exist as independent entities, but they do exist as "concepts" or "ideals," and a lot of tears have been shed over "capitalism" and "communism" just the same, so they are certainly "real" in that they can cause pain or pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of February 28, 2024 at 4:51 PM

Clue from Cicero in Section XXVIII:

The pleasure, he says, that is obtained from the cheapest things is not inferior to that which is got from the most costly. To say this is to be destitute not merely of intelligence, but even of a palate. Truly those who disregard pleasure itself are free to say that they do not prefer a sturgeon to a sprat; but he who places his supreme good in pleasure must judge of everything by sense and not by reason, and must say that those things are best which are most tasty.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 28, 2024 at 6:26 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Is Epicurus in fact saying that a longer life is not more pleasant than a shorter life, or is he only comparing the limited human span (whatever it is) to an unlimited span? Cicero is arguing that Epicurus said that length of time adds nothing to pleasure. Did Epicurus in fact say that?

Epicurus describes three components of pleasure (and pain): intensity, location and duration. You really can't single out any one of these components to generically evaluate pleasure. Ideally the three components, in a particular situation, combine to form an unmixed pleasure: the right intensity, the right location and the right duration. As long as the combination results in an unmixed pleasure, then you could say that it's more pleasant for it to last longer. But each component can have a limit which divides pleasure from pain in a specific circumstance.

Simply put, to my understanding the longer life of pleasure is more pleasant than the shorter life of pleasure. A life of any duration is finite, and not worth comparing to an unlimited span. Given that our lives are finite and happen only once, we should enjoy the life we have to the fullest. But when the time comes to leave, we don't invite pain by grasping onto the fact that life is, indeed, finite.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 28, 2024 at 6:43 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

This gets blurry as well in asking "are we talking about concepts vs things that have a material existence?"

Good question, but I sense a rabbit hole!!!

Here's a shot at it: "Idealism" as I've used the term is defined as a worldview that believes in perfect, ideal "Forms" that exist in some higher plane than the material world. "Materialism" as I've used the term is defined as a worldview that believes that everything that exists is either atom (physical) or void (empty, nothing).

Where the rabbit hole appears is where you try to figure out if any idea in the material world is physical or non-physical. The proper distinction, in my mind, is whether there are ideas that exist outside of the material world and in some higher dimension. It seems to me that Cicero and the Stoics both see ideas such as honor, virtue, courage as existing "out there" in a higher plane. This is why, for instance, the Stoics say that almost nobody can be truly Virtuous. Virtue in this case is more than an idea, it's a perfect "Ideal".

Post by "Cassius" of February 28, 2024 at 6:45 PM

Godfrey I agree with all your conclusions in Post 16, but I also have to say that

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Simply put, to my understanding the longer life of pleasure is more pleasant than the shorter life of pleasure.

... with which I also agree, would appear to most people to contradict [PD19](#) ([PD19](#). *Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure*) unless we clearly explain why that contradiction does not exist in a way that normal people can grasp.

I think there are ways to do that, but those ways are going to -- as you say and as I agree - make clear that living a longer life of pleasure is better than a shorter life of pleasure, and that's going to conflict with a lot of modern orthodox interpretation. *He who isn't satisfied with enough will never be satisfied! ... It doesn't matter to me if I die today!* And all that....

Before I go further I looked back at Torquatus' initial presentation of the ethics and this is really the only part I see that touches on [PD19](#) at all:

Quote from On Ends 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.*

I think we can productively ask why Torquatus's summary of Epicurean ethics *apparently* does not contain more explanation of this -- or maybe it does and we are just not seeing it. Rather than concluding that Cicero stacked the table and just omitted the explanation, I think we can infer that Cicero's interpretation of [PD19](#) as meaning that time doesn't matter - *which is probably the interpretation that prevails in Epicurean circles today* -- is where the error lies.

Torquatus never says that time doesn't matter, and the common senses position is that time DOES matter. Maybe the (limited) point being made is that the experience doesn't get any "better" -- but that word "better" is where the devil resides in the details. I think we should look to the argument people seem to be making about virtue being complete in itself for a clue as to how pleasure can be complete in itself.

It would be perverse to interpret Epicurus as saying that it doesn't "matter" to us how long we live, and yet that interpretation prevails.

It seems clear that "the highest degree of pleasure" as stated by Torquatus in interpreting the "no greater degree" in [PD19](#) is being given a limited technical meaning that is absolutely not intended to wipe out a common sense understanding that a longer life of pleasure is generally going to be preferred to a shorter life of pleasure.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 28, 2024 at 7:03 PM

[PD19](#). *Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of joy, if its limits are measured out through reasoning.*

It's critical to note that [PD19](#) makes no reference to a life, only to time and to joy. (At least in English: greater minds than mine can confirm that that's the case in the Greek.) The reasoning mentioned is to come to the understanding that a life has a limit in time, which separates it from the infinite. There's nothing more to it than that.

In order to come to the Ciceronian interpretation you would have to add in "a life," or replace time with life: "A finite life and an infinite life contain the same amount of joy...." This isn't what

Epicurus was saying at all.

Post by “Cassius” of February 28, 2024 at 7:35 PM

I will run the current state of the discussion past the Zoom group tonight and we can assemble the circular firing squads again after that 😊

Post by “Cassius” of February 29, 2024 at 5:37 AM

We had some interesting discussion in the Zoom tonight, with most of the comments being relatively consistent with what has been discussed already.

My own thoughts are not likely to be satisfied without more clarity (citations) on what exactly the non-Epicureans were arguing about about the nature of the "limits" argument (which I perceive to be likely another way of stating Plato's "class of the infinite" argument).

For me, the most clear statement at the moment of what I perceive to be the "limits" argument remains that of Seneca. I wonder that the next-to-last sentence in this translation could be made more clear, and I would like to see this more precisely stated using the word "limit" in the sense of edge or "definition" (in the sense of high-definition photo) but i think this helps a lot:

Seneca's Letters - To Lucilius - 66.45: "What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.[5] What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect."

It's the last sentence that seems to me to be most revealing. I wonder if the meaning of "perfect" here is not "perfect in the sense of best" but rather "perfect in the sense of perfected / finished / sharp."

In other words, an incomplete / imperfect jar is not really a jar at all - it is something else that is in the process of becoming a jar, but it is not a jar at all.

If that is the direction of the argument, then incomplete or unfinished pleasure is not really pleasure at all, and the drift of the argument from Seneca's / Plato's / Cicero's perspective is that "pleasure" cannot really be experienced at all, because it is always accompanied by pain of some sort, and that the experience is mixed and not the same as pleasure.

From Epicurus' perspective, this argument (that it is impossible to experience pleasure at all because it is always mixed with pain) is solved by showing that what we are experiencing anytime we feel pleasure in some part of our experience. In other words, there is no such thing as "incomplete" pleasure, because if you feel pleasure you know it is pleasure because it does not feel painful.

This interpretation would place the emphasis on understanding from a conceptual perspective that pleasure is pleasure and pain is pain and they can exist in *different* parts of the body and in different amounts of duration and different intensities, but that these differences do not mean that what is being experienced at any moment of pleasure is not pleasure.

This interpretation would also mean that what is being discussed is not the "best" or the "highest" pleasure at all, but whether "pleasure" itself can be said to exist as a certain thing that can be experienced, or whether it is always (like a gas or liquid) something that can never be grasped and is always "slipping through our fingers."

Were it not for the understanding that every experience of pleasure is "complete in itself," then one would never be able to experience pleasure at all.

It seems to me that that might be an interpretation of [PD03](#) that would explain how it fits in parallel along with [PD01](#) and [PD02](#) as an antidote (ok, a "remedy" if you like) for a major error that has to be refuted. The three are:

(1) The error that a "god" would concern himself with us is refuted by the position that a god is complete in itself,

(2) the error that the state of being dead is a concern for us is refuted by showing that where life is, death is not (life is complete without needing any aspect of death) and

(3) the error of thinking that pleasure can never be attained is refuted by establishing that pleasure too is complete in itself. All pleasure is complete in itself because given that there are only two feelings, whenever what we are feeling is not painful it is pleasurable - pleasure is complete wherever pleasure exists. The life that contains some pain does not fail to contain pleasure, it is just the life of a human being, in contrast to the life of a "god," which has attained the ability to never experience pain.

[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.

Nothing here would then be intended to imply that "absence of pain" should be understood to describe is the most intense pleasure, the longest pleasure, or the pleasure covering the most numerous parts of the body. Nor would it imply at all that you need not concern yourself with continuing to stay alive, because you do in fact want to experience more pleasure by staying alive. The main point would be that since pleasure is complete wherever pleasure exists, the consideration of "pleasure" to be a proper goal of life does make sense, because it is in fact possible to experience pleasure. You're not doomed to be always drowning an inch below the surface never able to breathe - you do in fact figuratively "break through to the surface of the water and escape drowning" every time you experience any pleasure at all.

It would be very desirable to see if there are other surviving texts (such as the Seneca quote, or the statement in Hermotimus) that will make clear that this aspect of completeness was what was being argued by the non-Epicurean philosophers. Finding statements even more clear than Seneca's would help nail down this perspective and keep us from going around and around being frustrated that Plato's [Philebus](#) argument was not as clear as we would like it to be asking: **SOCRATES: *Have pleasure and pain a limit, or do they belong to the class which admits of more and less?***

Understanding and being able to explain clearly to an ordinary person why asked that question, and why Epicurus' answer would differ from that of Plato, is key.

Post by "Don" of February 29, 2024 at 7:32 AM

Here's another translation of that Seneca quote, starting a little earlier in the letter ([LXVI.8-9](#))

"Therefore the power and the greatness of virtue cannot rise to greater heights, because increase is denied to that which is superlatively great. You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate. 9. Every virtue is limitless; for limits depend upon definite measurements. Constancy cannot advance further, any more than fidelity, or truthfulness, or loyalty. What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.[5] What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect."

Seneca is saying that a virtue is limitless, it is infinite in that nothing can be added to it *because* it has no limits. If something could be added, it wouldn't be infinite. It seems to me it's the "adding" part that is important. Epicurus comes along and says pleasure has a limit (the

removal of all pain) but, by definition, once all pain is removed and pleasure is complete, no more pleasure can be added. Therefore, as Seneca says "the power and the greatness of virtue cannot rise to greater heights, because increase is denied to that which is superlatively great. You will find nothing straighter than the straight,..." Epicurus answers that by saying pleasure cannot rise to greater heights than the absence of all pain, therefore, pleasure cannot be added to once it has replaced all pain.

Post by "Cassius" of February 29, 2024 at 7:54 AM

Thank you Don for the extra Seneca because that ("*You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate*") does make the point more clear.

I think we are on the same track but for *perhaps* the final sentence:

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus answers that by saying pleasure cannot rise to greater heights than the absence of all pain, therefore, pleasure cannot be added to once it has replaced all pain.

If pleasure IS absence of pain, as Torquatus insists to Cicero multiple times, then the same analysis applies to pleasure as to virtue. There is no "rising" or "moving" involved in the analysis at the level we are talking about. "You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate." It's easy to extend that to "You will find nothing more pleasurable than pleasure."

The important point would be NOT that it is essential to remove all pain in life before we can experience pleasure. Only "the gods" can do that, and that is the lever that Cicero is using to argue that Epicurus makes no sense. Cicero is saying that Epicurus himself does not even experience pleasure because what he in fact experiences is a mixture of pleasure and pain, which is not pleasure.

The important point would be that WHEREVER pleasure exists, pain is absent, which means that anytime we experience pleasure we are in fact experiencing pleasure in the full and complete sense of the term. Nothing is more pleasurable than pleasure.

If this were not so, then we would never be able to experience pleasure at all, because what we would be experiencing would be some incomplete pleasure, some mixture of pleasure and pain,

which from this perspective is not pleasure at all. A "mixture" is not the same thing as a "thing in its pure form."

So this "pleasure is the absence of pain" is necessary to comprehend that it is possible to experience pleasure at all.

This would be the "mental" part of the perspective, the part that the mind has to do in order for the person to understand that what his body feels when it feels pleasure is not lacking something, but which is in fact complete.

And since I think it is fair to say that Seneca is even more derivative as a philosopher than is Cicero, we are going to find this same point argued in other forms in other philosophers of the Platonic-Stoic line. But at the moment, this particular passage from Seneca stands out for its clarity.

Post by “Cassius” of February 29, 2024 at 8:15 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus answers that by saying pleasure cannot rise to greater heights than the absence of all pain, therefore, pleasure cannot be added to once it has replaced all pain.

Still thinking about this, and to repeat a point from post 23, I think a danger in emphasizing this "pleasure cannot be added to once it has replaced all pain" part of the perspective is that the superficial point overwhelms the deeper point. While it is true that once "all pain is removed no more pleasure can be added," that situation is effectively limited only to "the gods." If we obsess over the goal of eliminating "all pain" then we are trying to duplicate Zeus, which we can never fully do.

Now we can approximate Zeus *figuratively*, and I think that's what Epicurus is talking about as "competing with Zeus" and "living as a god among men." But that distinction between *literally* eliminating all pain and becoming a Zeus, vs *figuratively* eliminating as much pain as possible so you can run with Zeus for a while, is very important.

What I think a lot of writers about Epicurus are doing is saying that your literal goal is to *be* Zeus by draining every drop of pain from experience, and they imply the best way to do that is live on bread and water in a cave. When living ascetically fails to satisfy us, as it always will, we set ourselves up for disappointment and thus fail to be as happy as we could otherwise. So from that perspective wanting to *be* Zeus would be a natural but *unnecessary* desire - unnecessary

because while the variation is desirable, we can live approximately like Zeus while we are alive and say we have tasted the same thing. Frustration at not being perfect doesn't become an enemy of living a good pleasant life.

So to repeat what I think is the main point that needs center stage:

You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate -- and you will also find nothing more pleasurable than pleasure.

This does in fact place pleasure in the same category of "completable" or "graspable" things as virtue, which as [Joshua](#) stated in the podcast, could be a concern --- but the concern isn't a problem when you see that the main issue is not that the perfect is being made the enemy of the good, but in fact the perfect is a "concept" that is being used as a guide toward the good, never to be confused with our actual experience. That's another application too of "all models are wrong, but some models are useful." Neither the words "virtue" nor "pleasure" exist as entities out in the universe on their own - they are just conceptions of the human mind, but when viewed properly they are very useful conceptions.

Post by “Cassius” of February 29, 2024 at 9:35 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

This does in fact place pleasure in the same category of "completable" or "graspable" things as virtue, which as Joshua stated in the podcast, could be a concern --- but the concern isn't a problem when you see that the main issue is not that the perfect is being made the enemy of the good, but in fact the perfect is a "concept" that is being used as a guide toward the good, never to be confused with our actual experience. That's another application too of "all models are wrong, but some models are useful." Neither the words "virtue" nor "pleasure" exist as entities out in the universe on their own - they are just conceptions of the human mind, but when viewed properly they are very useful conceptions.

Given that [Joshua](#) stated his concern very eloquently in the podcast episode that there was a danger in viewing pleasure as the stoics apparently viewed virtue, this issue deserves further comment.

Joshua was essentially affirming the hazards of *letting the perfect be the enemy of the good*. Joshua stated that it would be very self-defeating and would lead to all sorts of frustrations and

other negative consequences if you allow perfectionism to prevent you from achieving the "good enough." We see that all the time in real life, when people get obsessed with perfection. We run into the problem than an friend once mentioned in the form of a question: "You know what happened to the man who kept searching for the perfect woman? He found her but couldn't keep her, because she was searching for the perfect man!"

It seems to me that Joshua's concern is very close to what has happened to many modern Epicureans. In thinking that "absence of pain" means that they must drain every ounce of pain from their lives, which they frequently think is best done through "simple living / asceticism," they obsess over their goal just like a stoic obsesses over virtue. When they fail to achieve a pleasurable life, which they always fail to do ([PD25](#). ***If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles***) they either stay frustrated or give up on the philosophy completely or just compartmentalize it as just another impractical philosopher's dream.

If, in contrast, we follow the lead of Torquatus' statements and see that the primary meaning of Epicurus' doctrine is that pleasure is absence of pain and absence of pain is pleasure, then we see that the terms are interchangeable and mean nothing more of less than each other. Seeing that, we don't fall for the trap of pursuing frugality or luxury as the way to a happy life of pleasure. We can see that since pleasure is absence of pain then we can spend our time on whatever combination of pleasures that result from "outside stimulation" or "inner appreciation of living" that we ourselves find most suited to our conditions and our preferences and our personalities.

We need to be "extraordinarily obstinate" on this point: ***On Ends Book Two, 9*** : Cicero: "...[B]ut unless you are extraordinarily obstinate you are bound to admit that 'freedom from pain' does not mean the same thing as 'pleasure.'" Torquatus: "Well but on this point you will find me obstinate, for it is as true as any proposition can be." Which is basically the same, but more starkly clear given the surrounding conceptual argument, as Epicurus saying in the letter to Menoeceus that *"By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul."*

Getting confident on this issue is going to mean getting confident in seeing why Torquatus was right in saying that this formulation is as true as any proposition can be. It seems very similar to using the same reasoning which leads someone to say *"You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate"* to also conclude that *"there is nothing more pleasurable than pleasure."*

Post by "Cassius" of February 29, 2024 at 12:36 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

"Therefore the power and the greatness of virtue cannot rise to greater heights, because increase is denied to that which is superlatively great. You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate. 9. Every virtue is limitless; for limits depend upon definite measurements. Constancy cannot advance further, any more than fidelity, or truthfulness, or loyalty. What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.[5] What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect."

The closer you look at this the more clear it is, so we can thank Seneca in addition to Cicero.

Part of why this is complex to us is because of the multiple meanings of "limits", but Seneca makes it clear:

Every virtue is limitless; for limits depend upon definite measurements.

That's the sentence that shines the spotlight - what they are talking about when they are talking about limits is not "the highest" or "the best" but whether a thing can be measured with definite measurements.

Saying that "Absence of pain = pleasure" does not primarily refer to the "most intense" or "longest" or "widest scope of the organism" - it refers first and most importantly to a definite measurement which can be grasped and understood.

"Absence of pain" is important because it is a definite measurement of pleasure.

It is only by recognizing that "absence of pain equals pleasure" that we can conceptualize a definite amount of pleasure, and that applies regardless of whether we are talking about a length of time, a part of the body, a measure of intensity ---- or an entire lifetime.

Somewhere along the way the Stoics apparently took this to the ridiculous extreme exhibited in Hermodotimus that a moment at the top of the mountain of virtue would be worth a lifetime of effort. That makes no more sense than arguing that a moment of "pure pleasure" is worth a lifetime of effort.

But along the way, the observation that a definite measurement is possible allows you to talk about a goal and to see that no matter how long you live, the experience of pleasure never gets 'better' than before - it only varies. And yes more experiences of pleasure are desirable, so it is

desirable to live longer, but you can die knowing that you have not missed pleasure that was "better" than what you actually experienced while you were alive.

This perspective also fits along well with Martin's example of the set level of temperature which we have discussed a number of times and which Onenski brought up last night.

Post by "Godfrey" of February 29, 2024 at 3:47 PM

The idea of measurement is a great take on the subject. I'd like to envelop that in a "brute force" argument, which to me is common sense and available to everyone. **You need to have the big picture in mind before getting into the details.**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

SOCRATES: Have pleasure and pain a limit, or do they belong to the class which admits of more and less?

Understanding and being able to explain clearly to an ordinary person why asked that question, and why Epicurus' answer would differ from that of Plato, is key.

First step back and compares the competing worldviews of "Platonic Forms" to the worldview of "atoms and void and none other." You must think completely outside of (discard?) the Platonic worldview in order to fully understand Epicurus, even though Epicurus does the work to refute the Platonic worldview. The Platonic worldview is one of mysticism, which has no place for Epicurus.

Nothing material is perfect. Here's a minor reworking of Seneca, to emphasize this point:

"Therefore the power and the greatness of virtue cannot rise to greater heights, because increase is denied to that which is [a Platonic Ideal]. You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate. 9. Every virtue is limitless; for limits depend upon definite measurements. Constancy cannot advance further, any more than fidelity, or truthfulness, or loyalty. What can be added to that which is [a Platonic Ideal]? Nothing otherwise that was not [a Platonic Ideal] to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.[5] What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is [not a Platonic Ideal]."

Read in this context, PDs 18-25 are each about not getting caught up in the Platonic worldview.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So from that perspective wanting to be Zeus would be a natural but unnecessary desire - unnecessary because while the variation is desirable, we can live approximately like Zeus while we are alive and say we have tasted the same thing. Frustration at not being perfect doesn't become an enemy of living a good pleasant life.

This might even be considered an unnatural desire, since it's arises from the groundless opinion that you can achieve perfection. But from these two PDs it seems to be open to debate whether it's natural or unnatural, but not that it's unnecessary:

PD29. Among desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural and unnecessary, and some are unnatural and unnecessary (arising instead from groundless opinion).

PD30. Among natural desires, those that do not bring pain when unfulfilled and that require intense exertion arise from groundless opinion; and such desires fail to be stamped out not by nature but because of the groundless opinions of humankind.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 29, 2024 at 3:49 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If this were not so, then we would never be able to experience pleasure at all, because what we would be experiencing would be some incomplete pleasure, some mixture of pleasure and pain, which from this perspective is not pleasure at all. A "mixture" is not the same thing as a "thing in its pure form."

So this "pleasure is the absence of pain" is necessary to comprehend that it is possible to experience pleasure at all.

This sounds a lot like the argument that you can never get from point A to point B, because you can only advance half of the way at a time and the halfways keep getting smaller, *ad infinitum*. Can't remember the name of the argument....

Post by “Cassius” of February 29, 2024 at 6:18 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3728-episode-216-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-23-why-does-epicurus-say-length-of-ti/>

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

You must think completely outside of (discard?) the Platonic worldview in order to fully understand Epicurus, even though Epicurus does the work to refute the Platonic worldview

I would say that definitely you do not have to be restricted by the bounds of the box set by Plato, but I do not think it is a good idea to "discard" knowledge of Plato's worldview, because I think we see that Epicurus was in many cases responding to an argument of Plato, so you have to know that the argument came from Plato in the first place, and at least understand its outline, so you can understand why Epicurus is addressing the issue.

I think most of us would say that the argument that a thing cannot be the good unless it can be contained within definite limits (nothing is straighter than straight) is a relatively absurd argument. And yet it seems in Epicurus' time it was a huge issue, huge enough to rank third in attention behind the first two [principal doctrines](#).

And yet because we today don't keep in mind the Platonic/Cicero/Seneca argument, we presume that Epicurus must be saying something else that is profound, and so a simple statement that pleasure also has definite measurements, and can therefore be grasped and attained, becomes transmuted into a call to live like a monk on bread and water in a cave!

I don't mean to sound too frivolous in that last paragraph. I think that's exactly what has happened, and why so many Epicureans today are in thrall of "simplicity" and "minimizing desires" and the other assorted corruptions that so attract those of Buddhist or Stoic mindset.

And it is also safe to say that there would be a lot of resistance by the same crowd to updating their viewpoint on what [PD03](#) and Absence of Pain are all about, but that's exactly what is needed from my point of view.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 29, 2024 at 9:25 PM

Agreed. However, I think it's important to begin with the big picture:

- Platonism and its offspring subscribe to a worldview that includes things beyond what is natural. These things include "Forms" and "Ideals" which are more real than material reality.
- Epicurus rejected anything beyond the natural, including "Forms" and "Ideals" which are more real than material reality.

That may be enough for some people to know, without diving deeper into the details. But every discussion of the details which has been prompted by a Platonist argument needs to begin with the explicit understanding that Platonism is antithetical to EP for these reasons. And this needs to be repeated, early and often. Apples and oranges.

How do you describe Platonism in Epicurean terms? You can't: it's nonsense. How do you describe EP in Platonic terms? The best example that we have comes from Epicurus, but in today's world that is extremely difficult to decipher. So every argument needs to begin with this distinction, because the Platonists insist on arguing in their own terms and discard the Epicurean worldview. If we want to resuscitate EP, we need to argue in our own terms. In this way we can point out the absurdities of Platonism while we explain EP.

That's my rant 😊 I'm not trying to refute any of the arguments being made above, I just feel that they need to be firmly and repeatedly placed in the proper context. Reframed. Which is to see Platonism through Epicurean eyes, and not to see EP through Platonic eyes. They're fundamentally incompatible.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 29, 2024 at 9:40 PM

P.S. [Joshua](#), in particular, is doing in the podasts exactly what I'm describing 👍 👍

Post by “Bryan” of March 2, 2024 at 7:40 PM

If every Pleasure was fully condensed in time and also existed in the whole organism -- or [at least] in the most important parts of its nature -- then Pleasures would never differ from one another. (KD 9)

Another argument using negative assumptions, showing that the opposite is true. This statement is in part a response to the view of the Κυρηναϊκοί (Cyrenaics), following Ἀρίστιππος ὁ Κυρηναῖος (Aristippus of Cyrene), that (1) pleasures do not differ from one another, (2) one pleasure is not more or less pleasant than another, and (3) any particular pleasure is momentary, unable to be prolonged. This incorrect understanding leads to indiscrimination in choosing pleasures.

In reality, even though pleasure cannot be increased beyond the absence of pain, pleasures are variable in duration (from momentary to continuous) and location (affecting different parts of

the body, including the mind) and have different qualities. Therefore, discrimination is required in choosing pleasures.

κατεπυκνοῦτο “was fully condensed” sg imperf ind, from κατα·πυκνῶ-[καταπύκνειν]: to pack tightly, compress, fill up; consider κατά·πυκνος-κατάπυκνος-κατάπυκνον: thick, close together; ἡ καταπύκνωσις-[τῆς καταπυκνώσεως]: condensation, densification; from πυκνῶ “to thicken, condense.” Consider ἡ πύκνωσις-πυκνώσεως: condensation, aggregation.

Consider «...πρὸς τοὺς ἐκ τῶν νεφῶν φάσκοντας **πυκνουμένων** τὴν τοῦ ὕδατος φύσιν ἀποτελεῖσθαι - καὶ νομίζοντας καὶ τοῦτο σημεῖον εἶναι ὡς ἐκ μιᾶς φύσεως ἅπαντα γίνεται **πυκνώσει** καὶ ἀραιώσει παρεξαλλαττούσης τὸν ἀέρα. (On Nature, Book 14, P.Herc. 1148, column 27, Fragment 6) ...to those who assert that the condensation of clouds results in the formation of water - and believe this to be a sign that everything is made from a single nature through the processes of condensation and rarefaction affecting the air.»

The prefix "κατα-" formed a technical term that seems to have been associated with Ἐπίκουρος. It is used mockingly by Ἀθήναιος (Athenaeus), author of Δειπνοσοφισταί (Deipnosophistae, Dinner Sophists), saying «Ἐπίκουρος οὕτω **κατεπύκνου** τὴν ἡδονήν - ἐμασᾶτ' ἐπιμελῶς. Εἶδε τάγαθὸν μόνος ἐκεῖνος οἶόν ἐστιν (Δειπνοσοφισταί 3.103b) Ἐπίκουρος in this way ‘condensed pleasure’ - he chewed attentively. He was the only one who knew what the good is.»

Ἀλκίφρων (Alciphron), in his fictional letters, uses the word in association with Ἐπίκουρος «Τοῦτο εἶναι ‘τὸ τῆς σαρκὸς ἀόχλητον’ καὶ ‘τὴν **καταπύκνωσιν** τοῦ ἡδομένου’ (Τὰ Ἀλκιφρονεία 3.19.8) This is ‘the lack of disturbance of the flesh’ this is ‘the condensation of the pleased.’»

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2024 at 8:12 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

This statement is in part a response to the view of the Κυρηναῖκοί (Cyrenaics), following Ἀρίστιππος ὁ Κυρηναῖος (Aristippus of Cyrene), that (1) pleasures do not differ from one another, (2) one pleasure is not more or less pleasant than another, and (3) any particular pleasure is momentary, unable to be prolonged. This incorrect understanding leads to indiscriminate in choosing pleasures.

That's very helpful Bryan! Is the source of that information from Diogenes Laertius, or somewhere else? It's probably worth it to track this down to a particular cite so that we can annotate [PD09](#) with this information. Do you know how they come up with that (what seems to me) very strange set of positions? Is the explanation in the cite you are referencing?

Post by “Bryan” of March 2, 2024 at 8:56 PM

Yes, for this I was mostly looking at DL 2.86-90: (Hicks trans.) Those then who adhered to the teaching of Aristippus and were known as Cyrenaics held the following opinions. They laid down that there are two states, pleasure and pain, the former a smooth, the latter a rough motion, and that pleasure does not differ from pleasure nor is one pleasure more pleasant than another. [87] The one state is agreeable and the other repellent to all living things. However, the bodily pleasure which is the end is, according to Panaetius in his work *On the Sects*, not the settled pleasure following the removal of pains, or the sort of freedom from discomfort which Epicurus accepts and maintains to be the end. They also hold that there is a difference between "end" and "happiness." Our end is particular pleasure, whereas happiness is the sum total of all particular pleasures, in which are included both past and future pleasures.

[88] Particular pleasure is desirable for its own sake, whereas happiness is desirable not for its own sake but for the sake of particular pleasures. That pleasure is the end is proved by the fact that from our youth up we are instinctively attracted to it, and, when we obtain it, seek for nothing more, and shun nothing so much as its opposite, pain. Pleasure is good even if it proceeds from the most unseemly conduct, as Hippobotus says in his work *On the Sects*. For even if the action be irregular, still, at any rate, the resultant pleasure is desirable for its own sake and is good. [89] The removal of pain, however, which is put forward in Epicurus, seems to them not to be pleasure at all, any more than the absence of pleasure is pain. For both pleasure and pain they hold to consist in motion, whereas absence of pleasure like absence of pain is not motion, since painlessness is the condition of one who is, as it were, asleep. They assert that some people may fail to choose pleasure because their minds are perverted; not all mental pleasures and pains, however, are derived from bodily counterparts. For instance, we take disinterested delight in the prosperity of our country which is as real as our delight in our own prosperity. Nor again do they admit that pleasure is derived from the memory or expectation of good, which was a doctrine of Epicurus. [90] For they assert that the movement affecting the mind is exhausted in course of time. Again they hold that pleasure is not derived from sight or from hearing alone. At all events, we listen with pleasure to imitation of mourning, while the reality causes pain. They gave the names of absence of pleasure and absence of pain to the intermediate conditions. However, they insist that bodily pleasures are far better than mental pleasures, and bodily pains far worse than mental pains, and that this is the reason why offenders are punished with the former. For they assumed pain to be more repellent, pleasure

more congenial. For these reasons they paid more attention to the body than to the mind. Hence, although pleasure is in itself desirable, yet they hold that the things which are productive of certain pleasures are often of a painful nature, the very opposite of pleasure; so that to accumulate the pleasures which are productive of happiness appears to them a most irksome business.

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2024 at 9:27 PM

Thank you again Bryan. I'd like to test opinions on this part in particular. Do we think that *this* part, which is not stated to be inconsistent with Epicurus, would be something that Epicurus would have agreed with? If so, this would be a helpful statement of detail on the relationship between pleasure and happiness that i don't think we have preserved in the Epicureans' own texts to this level of detail. Much of this **does** seem to be consistent with Epicurus and at the moment I am inclined to believe that all of it may represent the Epicurean view as well as Cyreniac.

Anyone see a reason to reject any of this?

[Quote from Bryan](#)

They also hold that there is a difference between "end" and "happiness." Our end is particular pleasure, whereas happiness is the sum total of all particular pleasures, in which are included both past and future pleasures.

[88] Particular pleasure is desirable for its own sake, whereas happiness is desirable not for its own sake but for the sake of particular pleasures. That pleasure is the end is proved by the fact that from our youth up we are instinctively attracted to it, and, when we obtain it, seek for nothing more, and shun nothing so much as its opposite, pain. Pleasure is good even if it proceeds from the most unseemly conduct, as Hippobotus says in his work *On the Sects*. For even if the action be irregular, still, at any rate, the resultant pleasure is desirable for its own sake and is good.