

Episode 217 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 24 - Does Luck Control Whether An Epicurean Is Happy?

Post by "Cassius" of March 1, 2024 at 1:22 PM

Welcome to Episode 217 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](#).

Last week we focused on why Epicurus said that time does not make pleasure better. This week pick up further along in Section XXVII, where Cicero charges Epicurus with inconsistency in saying that pleasure is the root of happiness, when pleasure requires things external to us which are subject to fortune and not under our own control.

REID EDITION

XXVII

Oh, but our philosopher is subject to pain as well. Yes, but he sets it at nought; for he says that, if he were being roasted, he would call out how sweet this is! In what respect then is he inferior to the god, if not in respect of eternity? And what good does eternity bring but the highest form of pleasure, and that prolonged for ever? What boots it then to use high sounding language unless your language be consistent? 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.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58947042>

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2024 at 9:28 AM

I think in this episode we will begin with a recap of what we discussed last week (the respects in which time does and does not make a difference in "pleasure"). We can talk about the comments made since then about how "pleasure" can be viewed from the same perspective as the Stoics viewed virtue. Paraphrasing Seneca, we can explain that there is nothing straighter than straight, nothing more true than true, and nothing more pleasurable than pleasure.

That will give us an opportunity to review Dewitt's subsection on "The Unity of Pleasure, starting on page 232 of his book. There we have DeWitt's explanation as to how all pleasures fit into a single class, all being good, irrespective of time or intensity or part of the body affected ~~these pleasures themselves but because of the discomforts that follow upon them.~~" ⁴² **The net effect of these pronouncements is to put all pleasures in a single class, all being good, irrespective of extension or condensation or of the organ affected or of approval or disapproval, which attach only to consequences. This is an instance where Epicurus exhibited deeper insight than Plato in the latter's own field, discerning the one in the many.**

That should put us in good position to understand the proper response to Cicero's new arguments that Epicurus doesn't seem to recognize the distinctions between pleasures that any ordinary person recognizes. We will then be better able to go back and forth between "the one" and "the many" without being thrown off by the different perspectives.

As I write this I am trying to think of an article or section of one of the recognized commentary books that makes this same point. Can anyone think of one?

Probably this issue would be expected to be covered in a section that mentions the "kinetic/kastatematic" classification, but instead of making DeWitt's point that all pleasures are pleasure, thus explaining Epicurus consistently through the unity of pleasure, most of the ones I am aware of go off the rails in stressing the differences between the two. They argue that one is better and more to be chosen than the other, which defeats the "unity" point, turns the argument on its head, and undermines the argument rather than explaining it.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3737-episode-217-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-24-does-luck-control-whether-an-epicu/>

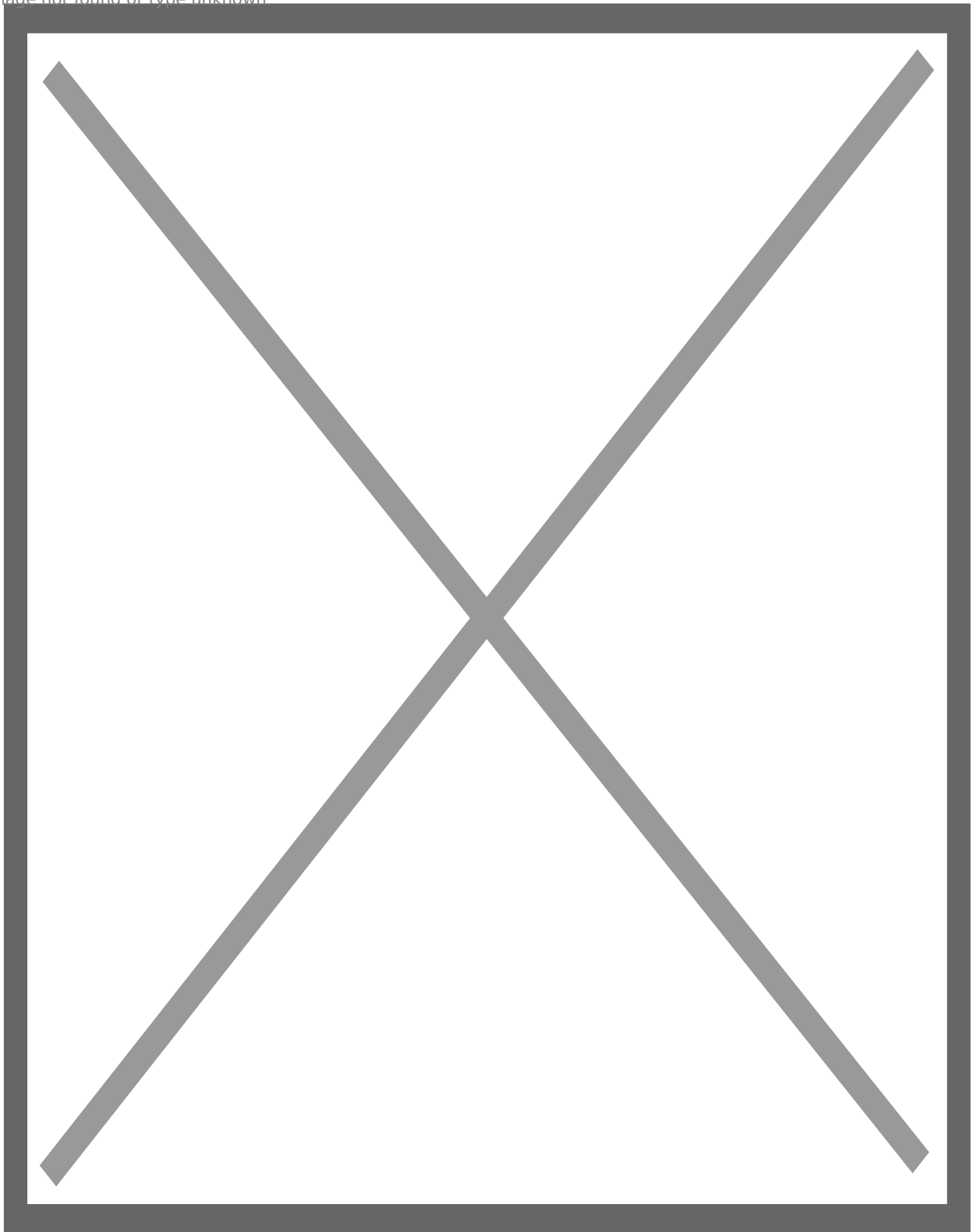
Post by “Kalosyni” of March 2, 2024 at 9:32 AM

[Quote from Cicero \(On Ends Book 2\)](#)

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.

Just for fun here is information about the sprat (slightly smaller than a herring, they grow up to 18 cm (about 7 inches):

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[Sprat and the herring family](#)

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Sprat and the herring family. Sprat is the smallest fish species in the herring family. In this article, we will explain in detail.

www.mooijer.nl

And info about sturgeons (can grow up to 12ft long and sometimes bigger):

[What Does Sturgeon Taste Like?](#)

Discover the taste of Sturgeon, a culinary delight with a rich, creamy flavor. Learn how to buy, cook, and enjoy this prehistoric fish.

www.foodmeetsflavor.com

[Sturgeon - Wikipedia](#)

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2024 at 9:39 AM

So it looks like Sturgeons are *both* much larger and much tastier than sprats and therefore very easy to distinguish from each other?

Is sprat a delicacy?

Sprat is not typically seen as a delicacy like lobster, salmon, eel or, of course, herring. And yet sprat is a delicious fish: fatty, soft and creamy in flavour; when hot-smoked, it can even be compared to eel. However, sprat's status is nowhere near that of eel or herring, and for that reason, often referred to as the most undervalued fish species.

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 2, 2024 at 9:40 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So it looks like Sturgeons are both much larger and much tastier than sprats and therefore very easy to distinguish from each other?

Yes, and sturgeons provide enough meat for many people and were served at feasts in ancient times.

Post by “Don” of March 2, 2024 at 10:01 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

even be compared to eel

Oh, I loves me some eel. I've never had it other than as sushi (grilled unagi), but I order it regularly when we get sushi. Sooo good. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2024 at 10:43 AM

Well then when we discuss Cicero's ordinary person who can distinguish sturgeon from sprat we can call the ordinary person "Don."

In our case, however, unlike with Cicero himself, our imaginary person "Don," who has no problem distinguishing ordinary-tasting-fish from better-tasting fish, also has no problem calling both types of fish-eating "pleasure" without feeling himself to be philosophically inconsistent!

Post by “Don” of March 2, 2024 at 11:13 AM

That hypothetical "Don" character sounds like one sharp cookie 😄

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2024 at 12:25 PM

This comment is relevant to many discussions, and I hate to think of how many instances of this quote need to be changed on this forum. I have changed some of the most important and most recent, but if anyone sees this somewhere and wants to drop me a line to correct it please do.

I thank [Bryan](#) for point this correction out to me, as I think it goes to a central point where the some editions of "On Ends," can be misleading.

The issue is the underlined part of this exchange between Cicero and Torquatus at Book 2, section 11 (Torquatus speaking first):

“‘Can then,’ my friend said, ‘anything be sweeter than to feel no pain?’ ‘Nay, I said, ‘be it granted that there is nothing better, for I am not yet investigating that question; does it therefore follow that painlessness, so to call it, is identical with pleasure?’ ‘It is quite identical, and is the greatest possible, and no pleasure can be greater.”

The Latin in the key phrase is "Plane idem, inquit, et maxima quidem, qua fieri nulla maior potest." (Cic. Fin. 2.11) which Bryan translates the same as Reid: "Clearly the same, he says, and indeed the greatest, beyond which none greater can possibly be."

However the better-known translation is Rackham, which I have used more frequently myself, and here it is [at Lacus Curtius](#):

"Well," he asked, "can anything be more pleasant than freedom from pain?" "Still," I replied, "granting there is nothing better (that point I waive for the moment), surely it does not therefore follow that what I may call the negation of pain is the same thing as pleasure?" "Absolutely the same," said he, "indeed the negation of pain is a very intense pleasure, the most intense pleasure possible."

I think that Rackham version is very misleading in using the word "intense," as "intensity is one of the three variables that Epicurus refers to in PDO9 (along with duration and part of the body affected). But what is being discussed here is what is the "Greatest" pleasure, more in the context of the "limit" of pleasure or the "measurement of pleasure" as we have been discussing. It is not a question of "intensity" and more than it is a question of "duration" or "part of the body involved."

Epicurus never said that you reached the "greatest pleasure" by dialing up the "intensity" knob to 100%, or dialing up the "duration" knob to 100%, or dialing up the "part of the body" to 100%. How you dial those three knobs is going to be a matter of personal preference within the context of your personal circumstances.

So if we are going to keep in mind a distinction between the "greatest pleasure" as against "the most intense pleasure," this Book 2:11 quote needs to be as Reid has translated it, rather than Rackham.

I am going to look for the Yonge translation and add it here for comparison when I have time. In the meantime thank you Bryan!

[Here is Yonge:](#) IV. Is it possible, said he, for anything to be more delightful than freedom from pain? Well, said I, but grant that nothing is preferable to that, (for that is not the point which I am inquiring about at present,) does it follow on that account, that pleasure is identical with what I may call painlessness? Undoubtedly it is identical with it, said he; and that painlessness is the greatest of pleasures which no other can possibly exceed.

Preliminary Conclusion: The problem is with Rackham, the most current and most wide-used of versions.

Post by “Cassius” of March 6, 2024 at 12:12 PM

Lucretius Today Podcast Episode 217 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 24 - "Does Luck Control Whether An Epicurean Is Happy?" Is Now Available -

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58947042>

Post by “Bryan” of March 13, 2024 at 3:50 PM

I really enjoyed your introduction Cassius!

Joshua, you provided many great points throughout, but I particularly enjoyed "Epicurus did not say it would be sweet to be roasted alive" (21:30). Correct and well said!

This was a helpful discussion everybody -- Thank you!

Post by “DavidN” of March 13, 2024 at 5:20 PM

Sprat sounds like candlefish we have here. I've seen people lined up along the pass hauling in buckets of candle fish during spawning. But you'll never see them on a menu. "The name "candlefish" derives from it being so fatty during spawning, with up to 15% of the total [body weight](#) in fat, that if caught, dried, and strung on a wick, it can be burned as a candle."

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