

Episode 251 - Cicero's OTNOTG 26 - How Niagara Falls Helps Us Understand the Flux, the Heap, and the Epicurean Gods

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2024 at 3:54 AM

Welcome to Episode 251 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 we have a thread to discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

Today we are continuing to review Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," which began with the Epicurean spokesman Velleius defending the Epicurean point of view. This week will continue into Section 39 as Cotta, the Academic Skeptic, continues to attack the Epicurean view of the nature of divinity.

For the main text we are using primarily the [Yonge translation, available here at Archive.org](#). The text which we include in these posts is available [here](#). We will also refer to the public domain version of the Loeb series, which contains both Latin and English, [as translated by H. Rackham](#).

Additional versions can be found here:

- [Frances Brooks 1896 translation at Online Library of Liberty](#)
- [Lacus Curtius Edition \(Rackham\)](#)
- [PDF Of Loeb Edition at Archive.org by Rackham](#)
- [Gutenberg.org version by CD Yonge](#)

A list of arguments presented [will eventually be put together here](#).

Today's Text

XXXIX. The whole affair, Velleius, is ridiculous. You do not impose images on our eyes only, but on our minds. Such is the privilege which you have assumed of talking nonsense with impunity. But there is, you say, a transition of images flowing on in great crowds in such a way that out of many some one at least must be perceived! I should be ashamed of my incapacity to

understand this if you, who assert it, could comprehend it yourselves; for how do you prove that these images are continued in uninterrupted motion? Or, if uninterrupted, still how do you prove them to be eternal? There is a constant supply, you say, of innumerable atoms. But must they, for that reason, be all eternal? To elude this, you have recourse to equilibration (for so, with your leave, I will call your ἰσονομία), and say that as there is a sort of nature mortal, so there must also be a sort which is immortal. By the same rule, as there are men mortal, there are men immortal; and as some arise from the earth, some must arise from the water also; and as there are causes which destroy, there must likewise be causes which preserve. Be it as you say; but let those causes preserve which have existence themselves. I cannot conceive these your Gods to have any. But how does all this face of things arise from atomic corpuscles? Were there any such atoms (as there are not), they might perhaps impel one another, and be jumbled together in their motion; but they could never be able to impart form, or figure, or color, or animation, so that you by no means demonstrate the immortality of your Deity.

XL. Let us now inquire into his happiness. It is certain that without virtue there can be no happiness; but virtue consists in action: now your Deity does nothing; therefore he is void of virtue, and consequently cannot be happy. What sort of life does he lead? He has a constant supply, you say, of good things, without any intermixture of bad. What are those good things? Sensual pleasures, no doubt; for you know no delight of the mind but what arises from the body, and returns to it. I do not suppose, Velleius, that you are like some of the Epicureans, who are ashamed of those expressions of Epicurus, in which he openly avows that he has no idea of any good separate from wanton and obscene pleasures, which, without a blush, he names distinctly. What food, therefore, what drink, what variety of music or flowers, what kind of pleasures of touch, what odors, will you offer to the Gods to fill them with pleasures? The poets indeed provide them with banquets of nectar and ambrosia, and a Hebe or a Ganymede to serve up the cup. But what is it, Epicurus, that you do for them? For I do not see from whence your Deity should have those things, nor how he could use them. Therefore the nature of man is better constituted for a happy life than the nature of the Gods, because men enjoy various kinds of pleasures; but you look on all those pleasures as superficial which delight the senses only by a titillation, as Epicurus calls it. Where is to be the end of this trifling? Even Philo, who followed the Academy, could not bear to hear the soft and luscious delights of the Epicureans despised; for with his admirable memory he perfectly remembered and used to repeat many sentences of Epicurus in the very words in which they were written. He likewise used to quote many, which were more gross, from Metrodorus, the sage colleague of Epicurus, who blamed his brother Timocrates because he would not allow that everything which had any reference to a happy life was to be measured by the belly; nor has he said this once only, but often. You grant what I say, I perceive; for you know it to be true. I can produce the books, if you should deny it; but I am not now reproving you for referring all things to the standard of pleasure: that is another question. What I am now showing is, that your Gods are destitute of pleasure; and therefore, according to your own manner of reasoning, they are not happy.

Post by "Don" of October 18, 2024 at 5:43 AM

On the belly:

Thread

[2 Philipians 3:19 "Their God is The Belly"](#)

2 Philipians 3:19

ων ο θεος η κοιλια "their god is the belly"

και η δοξα εν τη αισχυνη "and the δόξα 'principle, belief, etc. is in the shame"

Dewitt

epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/4150/

At first glance, this one at least seems to have promise. See:

[...]

So the "belly" is associated with the Epicureans. Paul uses a different word, κοιλῖα koilia, than it is in the 409 fragment, γαστήρ gastēr (where we get gastro-).

The second part "η δοξα εν τη αισχυνη." Dewitt translates δόξα...



Don

October 7, 2023 at 10:02 PM

See also U130 : Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, VII p. 279F: It was in fact, for the sake of the belly and the pleasures of the flesh in general that this man flattered Idomeneus and Metrodorus. ... Epicurus, in fact, was the teacher of these men.

[U409]

Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, XII p. 546F: And Epicurus says, "The principle and the root of all good is the pleasure of the stomach; even wisdom and culture must be referred to this."

***Ibid.*, VII p. 280A:** The master of these men, indeed, was Epicurus, who loudly proclaimed... ["The principle," etc., cited above].

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4091-episode-251-cicero-s-otnotg-26-how-niagara-falls-helps-us-understand-the-flux-th/>

Metrodorus, Letter to his Brother Timocrates, fr. 13 [p. 51 Duen.], by way of **Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 16, p. 1098D:** {We are not called to save the nation or get crowned by it for wisdom; what is called for, my dear Timocrates, is to eat and to drink wine, gratifying the belly without harming it.} ... It made me both happy and confident to have learned from Epicurus how to gratify the belly properly. ... {The belly, Timocrates, my man of wisdom, is the region that contains the highest end.}

Cf. Plutarch, Against Colotes, 30, p. 1125A: For it is the men who look with contempt on all these things as old wives' tales, and think that our good is to be found in the belly and the other passages by which pleasure makes her entry...

Ibid., 2, p. 1108C: ...by those who keep shouting that the good is to be found in the belly...

Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 17, p. 1098D: Indeed these people, you might say, describing a circle with the belly as center and radius, circumscribe within it the whole area of pleasure...

Cicero, Against Lucius Calpurnius Piso, 27.66: It is his habit in all his discussions to attach higher value to the pleasures of the belly than to the delights of the eye and the ear.

Cf. Plutarch, That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible, 2, p. 1087B: "Oho!" I said laughing. "It looks as if you are going to hop on their *belly* and make them run for their *flesh* when you take pleasure away..."

Cf. Hegesippus, by way of **Athenaeus, Deipnosophists, VII p. 279D (Com. IV p. 481)**

Post by "Cassius" of October 18, 2024 at 9:21 AM

[Quote from Cicero's Cotta speaking to Velleius](#)

To elude this, you have recourse to equilibration (for so, with your leave, I will call your ἰσονομία), and say that as there is a sort of nature mortal, so there must also be a sort which is immortal. By the same rule, as there are men mortal, there are men immortal; and as some arise from the earth, some must arise from the water also; and as there are causes which destroy, there must likewise be causes which preserve. Be it as you say;

This would appear to refer to isonomia, and there is little reason to doubt that Cotta/Cicero is applying it in a way that Velleius/Epicurus would not approve. I suspect the intentional distortion is that of failing to distinguish the *possible* from the *impossible*.

It seems likely to me that this is referring to an aspect of infinity. In an infinite universe things that are possible are going to recur an infinite number of times. The "infinite number of times" would account for the "equal" or "equitable" number. Given that presumption, you can deduce that things that *can* happen *will* happen an infinite numbers of times. Infinite = infinite so the number of occurrences is the same.

So I would presume that it's the "things that are possible" that Cotta/Cicero is evading. I'd say that's especially true when he says "by the same rule" and goes on to list scenarios that we see on earth do not occur at all. His references, in fact, (living beings springing from the air or sea) are similar to what Lucretius talks about do *not* happen due to the regular process of nature as governed by the atoms.

So I think we can dismiss earthlings being born in the earth and water as ruled out by uniform observation of earth-bound physics. But what might we infer about what Epicurus could have thought about equitable distribution of living things from mortal to deathless?

My first thought would be that humans (intelligent living things) have the ability to control their environments so as to extend their lives. The Greeks were certainly aware of medical treatments, and it was imaginable then, and readily predictable today, that medical technology will allow more and more transplants and replacements of body parts. It is easily conceivable that even brain transplants or rejuvenations, which are as yet impossible under current technology, will be attainable in the future.

As for survival past the destruction of Earth or any particular "world" due to the natural deterioration of all bodies over time that cannot fix themselves, there's no reason to think that Epicurus was dogmatic that it would be "impossible" for living beings to live in and travel through "outer space." For example, Lucian directly wrote about travel to the moon in "The True Story," and there's no reason to think that this obvious proposition was imaginable to many others. So as we are even about to do now in regard to travel to Mars, and then further on later outside the solar system, humanity will soon become "multi-planetary" to be followed by "interstellar" and then one day beyond our galaxy. Humanity will one day (if we stay on the current path) be able to survive any local supernovas or whatever, and as a whole will achieve a sort of "species immortality" or "species deathless." One would expect that any technological civilization that can travel interstellar will also be able to master the deterioration of the human body.

I don't think any of that would have been beyond the ancient Epicureans to imagine, and therefore since they would deem such a thing to be "possible" within the laws of physics, they would have been able to imagine living beings which can continuously replace the atomic structure of their bodies, which is essentially what we have Velleius relaying and Cicero/Cotta ridiculing. That would allow for a "distribution" of life (at each stage, in infinite numbers) all the way from quickly-expiring primitive organisms to intelligent beings who are in fact essentially "deathless." The only requirement of deathlessness is totally natural - such a being has to be

able to develop the technology to replace or rejuvenate their bodies so as to make death a matter of choice rather than necessity.

So something along these lines is what I would speculate the Epicureans were theorizing:

The impossible (such as anything *supernatural*) will not and can never occur. On the other hand, because the universe as a whole is infinite in space and eternal in time, all things that are possible will occur an equal (infinite) number of times. Intelligent living beings which develop the ability to control their experience have the possibility of extending their lives indefinitely. Species or individuals which do so are ultimately deathless, and there are the same number of them as there are being that are mortal.

Everything in this set of possibilities would be purely natural and involve nothing supernatural whatsoever.

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2024 at 9:36 AM

As to paragraph 40, the first part is essentially the "action" vs "idleness" argument which with I think we are pretty well equipped to deal. It also argues that since Epicurus values bodily pleasure, and Cotta does not admit that the gods of Epicurus have real bodies, or even quasi-bodies, then the gods cannot experience the kind of pleasure that Epicurus praises. This latter argument is often met by the argument that what Epicurus really valued is "katastematic" pleasure rather than bodily pleasure, which I think is an argument that is totally off the mark.

First:

Epicurean pleasure is **not** "inaction," no matter how much some people (who essentially agree with Cicero and the Platonic argument that virtue and the mind are higher or more "noble" than the ignoble pleasures of the body) might want to try to infer that based on the word "katastematic" or other arguments. Even mental thinking is a form of action, and the atoms of all living bodies are constantly moving. Only the living can experience pleasure of any kind, no matter how we slice up the numberless subtypes of "pleasure."

We've dealt with that a lot in the past so we should be able to present that clearly, but if anyone has ideas for illustrations or backup arguments please post.

Second:

Cotta refuses to admit that the contention that gods have quasi-bodies makes any sense, but that is the contention: the bodies of the gods are also made of atoms, but the atoms are continuously replenished indefinitely. Since the [Epicurean gods](#) do have bodies of a sort, there

is no reason that the [Epicurean gods](#) cannot experience both "bodily" and "mental" types of pleasures, just as humans do.

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2024 at 12:20 PM

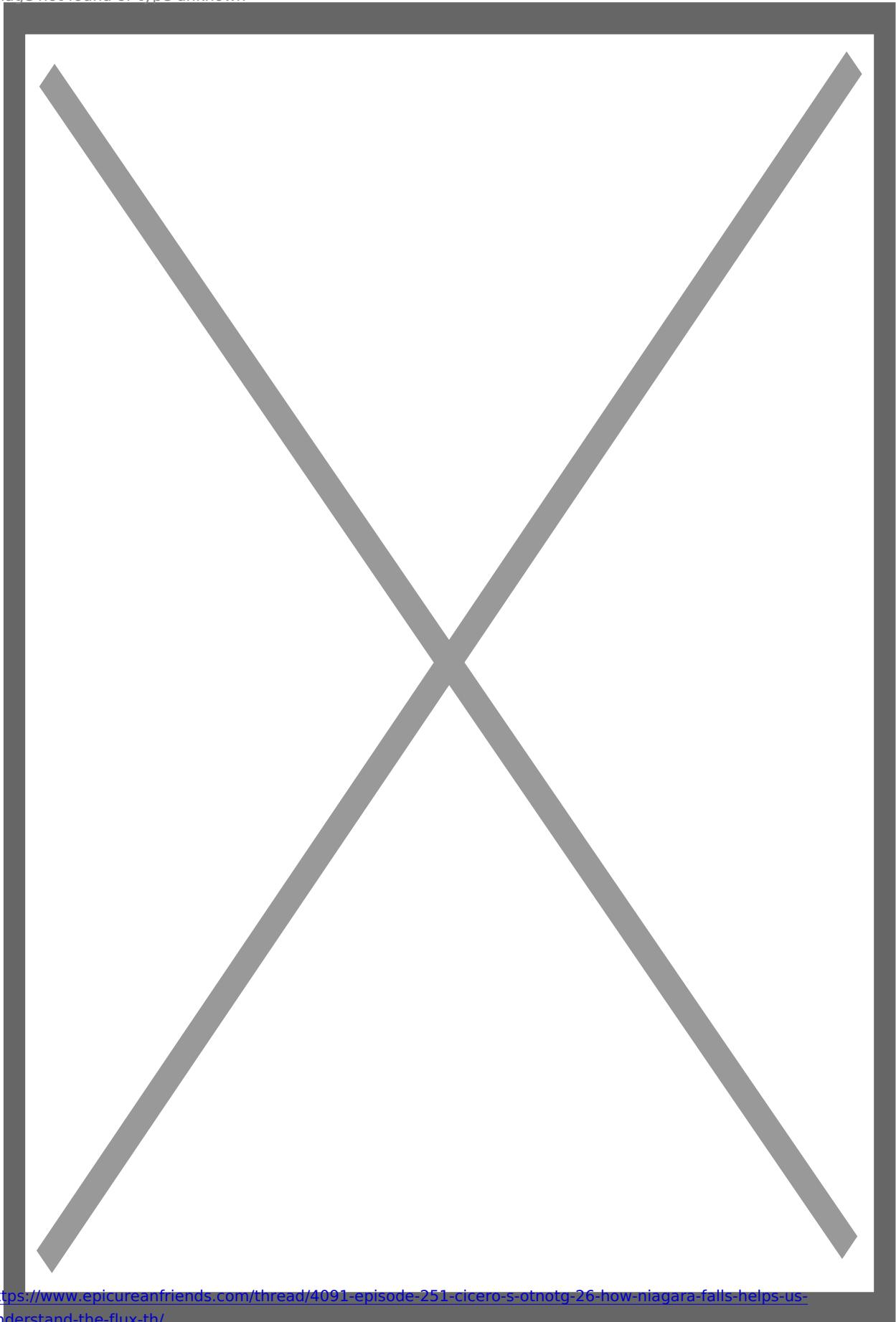
I don't have any cites but I would expect that the ancient Epicureans could well have been familiar with this example of bodily regeneration, which would be relevant to the possibility of continuous regeneration and therefore imperishability:

[Starfish](#), or sea stars, are [radially symmetrical](#), star-shaped organisms of the [phylum Echinodermata](#) and the [class Asteroidea](#).^[1] Aside from their distinguishing shape, starfish are most recognized for their remarkable ability to [regenerate](#), or regrow, arms and, in some cases, entire bodies. While most [species](#) require the central body to be intact in order to regenerate arms, a few tropical species can grow an entirely new starfish from just a portion of a severed limb.^[2] **Starfish regeneration** across species follows a common three-phase model and can take up to a year or longer to complete.^[2] Though regeneration is used to recover limbs eaten or removed by [predators](#), starfish are also capable of [autotomizing](#) and regenerating limbs to evade predators and reproduce.^[2]

Quote

Due to their wide range of regenerative capabilities, starfish have become [model organisms](#) for studying how the regenerative process has evolved and diversified over time. While the overall morphological processes have been well documented in many starfish, little is known regarding the underlying molecular mechanisms that mediate their [regeneration](#). Moreover, some researchers hope starfish may one day serve as inspiration for therapeutics aiming to expand the extent to which humans can repair and replace damaged cells or tissues.^[3]

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4091-episode-251-cicero-s-otnotg-26-how-niagara-falls-helps-us-understand-the-flux-th/>

[Starfish regeneration - Wikipedia](#)

en.m.wikipedia.org

[Pliny discussing Starfish](#) (but apparently not the regeneration quality):

CHAP. 86. (60.)—SEA-STARS.

In addition to what I have already stated, I find that authors, distinguished for their wisdom, express surprise at finding a star in the sea—for such, in fact, is the form of the animal, which has but very little flesh²⁸⁴⁵ within, and nothing but a hard skin without. It is said that in this fish there is such a fiery heat, that it scorches everything it meets with in the sea, and instantaneously digests its food. By what experiments²⁸⁴⁶ all this came to be known, I cannot so easily say; but I am about to make mention of one fact which is more remarkable still, and which we have the opportunity of testing by every day's experience.

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2024 at 12:36 PM

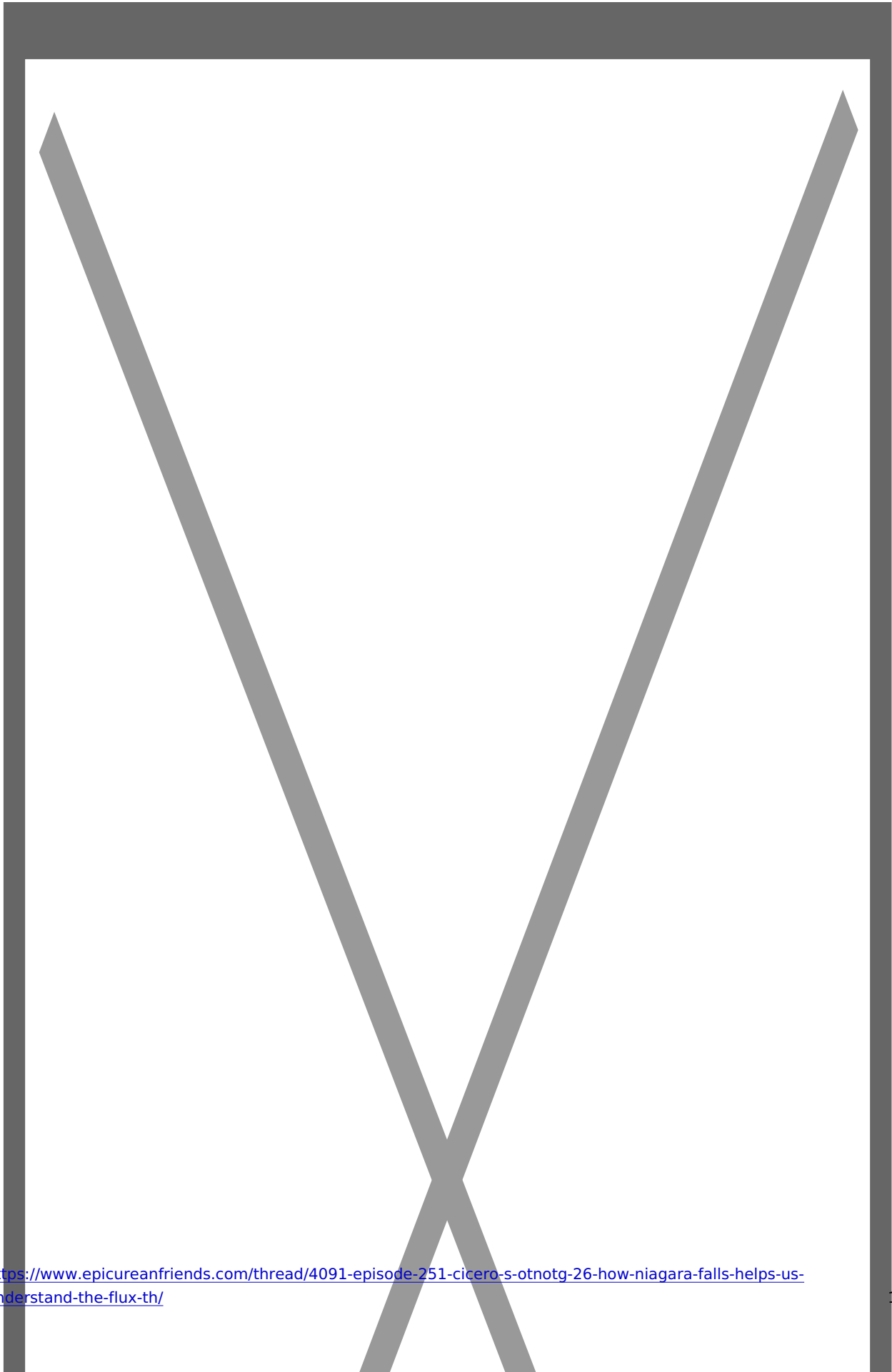
In case anyone is now thinking that Cassius thinks Epicurean god / aliens might look like Starfish, that's old hat from 1956! 😊



The starfish-like Pairans in discussion aboard the space station.

 Daiei Films - Public domain film *Warning from Space*

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4091-episode-251-cicero-s-otnotg-26-how-niagara-falls-helps-us-understand-the-flux-th/>

Post by “Cassius” of October 26, 2024 at 9:16 AM

Just to add this as a note for future thought and discussion, what we talk about in this podcast plays into our recent discussion of the sorites / heap question and how that is related both to the waterfall / bathing in the same river questions. And both of those play into the issue of seeing pleasure as both the composite ultimate good while also consisting of individual feelings of pleasure.

When Epicurus asked how he should recognize the good if not for the pleasures of sex, food, etc, that is essentially the same question as "how should he recognize a waterfall or a river if not for the drops of water that compose it?"

The point would not be that we should consider any individual drops of water to make up the whole waterfall, or any individual pleasures to make up the whole of good, but that the parts and the whole are both real and inseparably connected.

Our natural faculties allow us to assemble the notion of a "waterfall" or a "river" from the perceptions of the individual drops of which the waterfall or river is composed. Likewise, our natural faculties (perceptions and minds) allow us to assemble "the good" from the individual pleasures of which the notion of "the good" is composed. There is no conflict between saying that both individual drops and waterfalls exist and are real to us. Likewise it is proper to say that both individual pleasures and the overall concept of the good as pleasure exist and are real to us.

And just like a waterfall or a river or a heap exists through the movement of the particles that compose it, at least one type of living being could be held to exist indefinitely, analogous to a river or waterfall, if it could find a way to constantly replenish the movement of the particles that compose *it*.

But for the ethics question, which concerns more people today than the god question does, the point would be that the abstract good of pleasure can be said to exist only because it is a composite of all the constantly moving and changing particular pleasures that compose it. Were we to try to separate out all the individual physical and mental pleasures that compose it (such as sex, food, drink, calmness, delight, tranquility, etc) we would have nothing left by which to recognize the good. The concept of Pleasure as the good does not exist as a Platonic ideal, it exists and is recognized only by our perception of "Pleasure" as a composite many particular pleasures, in the same way that we perceive "heaps" or "waterfalls" or "rivers" as composites of

many grains of sand or drops of water.

Post by “Cassius” of October 26, 2024 at 9:45 AM

And applying that last observation about heaps and waterfalls to the statement in the letter to Menoeceus:

"When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind."

Given that we know that Epicurus DOES accept the pleasures of profligates and the pleasures of sensuality as pleasures, the better interpretation of what he is saying is incorporate Epicurus's position on the heap/river questions, to the effect that:

We should not identify the concept of pleasure as being limited ONLY to the particular pleasures of profligates or sensuality (such as sex, food, drink, etc) because that is not our definition of pleasure as the goal. The concept of Pleasure, which we take as our definition of the ultimate good, includes NOT ONLY those particular pleasures but ALSO all other pleasures, such as those of the mind, literature, art, calmness, etc. This "Pleasure as the good" does not exist as a Platonic ideal, it exists and is recognized only by our perception of many particular pleasures. The unifying characteristic of any set of particular pleasures is not that they reflect or partake of some ideal Platonic form or Aristotelian essence, but that we feel it to be pleasure, rather than feeling it to be pain.

It has always made sense to mentally insert an "ONLY" so as to read "When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean ONLY the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality..." given that we know that sensuality and even the things that profligates do are pleasurable. But placing this sentence in the context of the sorites/heap/waterfall/river question gives us a context in which to supply the missing "only." Waterfalls and rivers and heaps are not ONLY individual grains of sand or drops of water, they are a composite of the individual particles. Pleasure is not ONLY sensuality, but it is also *all feelings of all experiences in life which are not painful, because that is a necessary deduction from there being only two feelings, pleasure or pain, into one of which category all feelings must be placed.*

You can't recognize heaps or waterfalls or rivers without recognizing their components, and you can't recognize Pleasure as the good without recognizing all the individual pleasures of which the concept of Pleasure is composed.

Post by “Cassius” of October 26, 2024 at 11:05 AM

Lucretius Today Episode 251 is now available: "How Niagara Falls Helps Us Understand the Flux, the Heap, and the [Epicurean Gods](#)"

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/62513550>

Post by “Don” of October 26, 2024 at 1:20 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Display More

I'm going to push back a little on this interpretation of *Menoikeus* 131.

First, there is no "only" in the text. If you choose to insert that, that's up to you; but it's not there and I think that "only" adds a different - not necessarily intended by its author - interpretation. I believe Epicurus is clearly marking a contrast between his philosophy and the Cyrenaics with this section in the letter. While Epicurus is saying that he recognizes all that does not cause pain as under the category of "Pleasure is the telos," I don't believe he's "endorsing" the "pleasures of the "profligate/prodigal" (ἄσωτος)" as a way of life. I don't think that's what Cassius is saying either, but I want to make it clear that - from what I read here in this text and elsewhere - Epicurus is not endorsing the "sex, drugs, and rock n roll" lifestyle of the ἄσωτος (Read the quote from my commentary on that word below). Did Epicurus engage in drinking, revelry, etc.? Sure, I got no problem with that. Did he go on binges of drinking to find himself hungover and nauseated? Definitely not, as far as I'm concerned.

So, I think that suggested "only" is a dangerous interpolation to add to the text without an abundance of commentary... hence my little contribution below.

(PS: Full disclosure-- In re-reading my excerpt, I see I **too** added an "only" 😊 However, I would say I have a slightly different reason for adding it, relative to the Cyrenaic issue.)

I'm going to also add my commentary from my Letter to Menoikeus here:

Quote from Letter To Menoikeus Commentary

131g. Ὅταν οὖν λέγωμεν ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν,

- [οὖν] Ὅταν λέγωμεν "Therefore, whenever we say..."
- ἡδονὴν τέλος ὑπάρχειν, "the fact is that pleasure is the τέλος..."

- We encountered ὑπάρχειν back in verse 125 with the meaning of "the fact is..."
- I highly recommend going back to the end of commentary on verse 128 for a look at the implications and nuance of τέλος.
- "Therefore, whenever we say that pleasure is the τέλος..."

Warning! We're heading into the grammar weeds for a little while. Stay close!

There are two different verbs in 131g and 131h (our next line): λέγωμεν and λέγομεν

- λέγωμεν (subjunctive)
- λέγομεν (indicative)
 - Both are conjugations of λέγω. Λέγω originally meant "lay down" but came to mean "lay down an argument" or simply "say" or "speak."

The subjunctive mood has several uses. I believe what's going on here is the subjunctive with λέγωμεν in the indefinite clause is an exhortation "referring to repeated actions in indefinite present time." So what Epicurus is saying is that "we repeatedly say 'pleasure is the τέλος' all the time" when he uses λέγωμεν. Yes, you can say all that with one word in Greek.

The negative indicative οὐ λέγομεν in 131h, on the other hand, is a statement of fact: "we do not say." Period. There's no equivocation, no wiggle room. It's a statement of fact. "We say repeatedly all the time 'pleasure is the τέλος.' We do not say..."

Let's move on to see what we do not say.

131h.i. οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν,

- οὐ ...λέγομεν, "we don't say ..."
- τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς "the pleasure of those who are ἀσώτων"
 - ἀσώτων (genitive of ἄσωτος (asōtos)
 - LSJ defines ἄσωτος as "having no hope of safety, in desperate case; abandoned; spendthrift, profligate." The Latin synonym given is *perditus* "squander, dissipate, waste, throw away, lost"

A quick diversion on ἄσωτος is in order. For those readers with a background in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the parable of the Prodigal Son uses this exact word to describe the lifestyle chosen by the wayward son: *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.* (Luke 15:13, KJV) Here ἄσωτος is translated as "riotous living." The word also occurs in one other place, this time in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures (known to Christians as the "Old" Testament) to describe a sex worker, calling her ἀνεπερωμένη "inciting" and ἄσωτος "carnal."

(Proverbs 7:11) The original connotation of "having no hope" or "lost" gives an extra dimension to the word. The word literally is formed from ἄ- ("not") + σώζω (sōizō "save"): "not saved, lost, desperate." That sense, along with the "extravagant, prodigal, profligate," gives me a much richer sense of what Epicurus's point was.

It needs to also be pointed out that, unlike those Biblical references, there's no moral judgment being passed here. All pleasure is good. It's a question of the consequences. We'll discuss this after we examine how Epicurus describes the pleasure of those who are described as ἄσωτος.

131h.ii. ...καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν,

We return now to an examination of the second phrase on what "we don't say" that pleasure is: **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας.**

We can now address the variations and connotations of the word ἀπολαύσει noted above (124h and 130g). For those who would like more context for this discussion, there was an extensive thread on verses 131 and 132 on the *EpicureanFriends* online forum, some of which has been incorporated into my commentary here.

In 131h.ii, the word ἀπολαύσει is part of a prepositional phrase (ἐν ἀπολαύσει) which is embedded within the phrase τὰς κειμένας. Therefore, we have to unpack ἐν ἀπολαύσει, τὰς κειμένας, and τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας, and have to examine Epicurus's other uses of the word to be able to propose an interpretation of these verses.

Above, I brought up that ἀπολαύσει and its variants convey the idea of enjoyment, specifically "to have enjoyment of a thing, have the benefit of it." It can also convey "enjoy an advantage from some source." This also implies enjoyment of something external to oneself. One source from 1572 stated that the word could also be translated into Latin by *oblectationem* or *delectationem*. These also imply enjoyment of physical or sensual pleasures:

- oblectatio "a delighting, delight (a favorite word of Cicero)"
- delectatio "a delighting, delight, pleasure, amusement"

ἀπολαύσει, at its most basic meaning, is the "act of enjoying, fruition" or the "result of enjoying, pleasure." Again, this implies enjoying the benefit of something, as discussed in 124h and 130g with the additional meaning of "advantage got from a thing." To get another older perspective on the meaning of ἀπολαύσει, I also consulted the *Glossaria duo* (1572) by Henri Estienne (1528-1598).

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Interestingly, the synonyms are “Potiri, Frui, Perfrui; Fruicio” (To possess, to enjoy, to enjoy; I enjoy) conveying the enjoying of the fruits of something or even to possess something. Fruor is defined as “to derive enjoyment from a thing, to enjoy, delight in (with a more restricted signif. than use, to make use of a thing, to use it; to have the use and enjoyment of a thing.” This sense is very clear in the use of **ἀπόλαυσις** in Vatican Saying 27, where the “fruit” is explicitly included in the connotation:

*Whereas other pursuits yield their fruit only to those who have practiced them to perfection, in the love and practice of wisdom knowledge is accompanied by **delight**; for here **enjoying** comes along with learning, not afterward.*

*ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιτηδευμάτων μόλις τελειωθεῖσιν ὁ καρπὸς ἔρχεται, ἐπὶ δὲ φιλοσοφίας συντρέχει τῇ γνώσει τὸ τερπνόν· οὐ γὰρ μετὰ μάθησιν **ἀπόλαυσις**, ἀλλὰ ἅμα μάθησις καὶ **ἀπόλαυσις**.*

One is literally here taking delight in the fruit of the love and practice of wisdom.

All these connotations will be important as we explore what Epicurus is telling Menoikeus in verses 131 and 132.

In looking at κειμένας (from κεῖμαι), we see a variety of connotations:

1. to lie, lie outstretched
2. to lie asleep, repose, lie idle, lie still
3. to lie sick or wounded, lie in misery
4. to lie dead
5. to lie neglected, uncared for, unburied
6. (of wrestlers) to have a fall

In light of these, some in the *EpicureanFriends* discussion suggested the meaning of τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας to be something akin to “those who lie (in bed) in enjoyment,” i.e., “we’re talking about the kinds of things a person might enjoy while lying in bed.” They offered that sex is something one enjoys in bed, but I’m personally not persuaded on that point upon further reflection. The lying implied by κεῖμαι appears to be more stationary or idle instead of, let’s say, *actively engaging* in an activity while lying down, especially since one connotation is lying sick or dead. It seems to me to mean stuck in one spot.

Some also took the second τὰς as referring back to τὰς ἡδονὰς with the ἡδονὰς understood, so taken together “the pleasures of profligates or those [pleasures] lying in ἀπολαύσει.” That could very well be, but we could still see τὰς κειμένας as “those (people) κειμένας-ing.” I am persuaded that the τὰς κειμένας are “those (people) ‘lying’ in ἀπολαύσει” to contrast them with the ἄσωτος referenced in the same sentence.

The exact phrase τὰς κειμένας is cited in LSJ as being used by Demosthenes and Diogenes Laertius and translated into English as:

1. (those) deposited (Demosthenes, Against Olympiodorus 48:17)

2. (those) deposited (Diogenes Laertius 5:3:64; "*Arcesilaus shall also cancel the agreement made by Strato with Olympichus and Ameinias and **deposited** (τὰς κειμένας) with Philocrates the son of Tisamenus.*")

I believe the key to understanding Epicurus's message to Menoikeus here in 131 and 132 is looking at the entire phrase **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας** in its context within the letter.

Breaking this section down, we can rearrange it as follows:

Who are those ignorant or opposed to the philosophy of Epicurus and to his definition of pleasure referred to here?

(1) those who are prodigal

(A) (are) those who are ignorant

(2) those deposited in delighting in sensual pleasures (or taking pleasure in the fruit of things or activities external to themselves)

(B) (are) those who don't agree with us

(C) (and) those who believe wrongly

Activities of those ignorant or opposed:

(i) endless strings of drinking parties and festivals

(ii) ἀπολαύσεις παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν (not translating for now...see below)

(iii) extravagant tables of fish and other things

I have come to believe that interpreting τὰς κειμένας in the sense of being *deposited*, being *idle*, lying *still*, lying dead, or, if you will, being *stuck* "in ἀπολαύσει" is of great importance to understanding Epicurus's intent here.

Furthermore, many translations just use "enjoyment" for ἀπολαύσει, but we know Epicurus taught that we are meant to enjoy life, to take pleasure in it. We should *enjoy* the fruits of the love and practice of wisdom. What is the nuance of ἀπολαύσει that he can tell Menoikeus that he doesn't mean "taking enjoyment" in things when he says pleasure? We have to remember that Epicurus uses ἀπολαύσει in both positive and

negative ways in his writings and that we need to parse them carefully.

I am now of the opinion that **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας** should be interpreted as "those who are *stuck* in enjoying (only) those things which provide enjoyment from outside themselves." To me, this is a direct reference to the "incorrect" beliefs of the Cyrenaics and others in relation to pleasure. And, yes, the reader is correct that I'm referring to the kinetic and katastematic pleasures that Epicurus mentions. I realize this will be considered controversial by some, but I believe this best explains Epicurus's being able to use **ἀπολαύσει** in both positive and negative senses.

Epicurus is on record for including *both* kinetic and katastematic pleasures within his definition of "pleasure." I have now come to understand kinetic pleasures as those arising from factors and circumstances and that "stand out" from our "background" state of katastematic pleasures within ourselves (such as tranquility, pleasurable memories, etc.). A metaphor discussed at the *EpicureanFriends* forum for this was that katastematic pleasures are the calm ocean while kinetic pleasures are the waves which we can surf. We can enjoy both floating on the calm water as well as the catching the waves and "shooting the curl." While Epicurus conveys (along with Metrodorus and Philodemus) that we can be more confident in katastematic pleasures, we continue to "delight" in kinetic pleasures when they are available. It is the exclusivity of "getting stuck in" only seeing kinetic pleasures as pleasure that Epicurus is objecting to here with **τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας**.

131i. ὡς τινες ἀγνοοῦντες καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντες ἢ κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι νομίζουσιν,

- ὡς "as, like" (introducing a simile as to the pleasures of the ἄσωτος are like...)
- τινες ἀγνοοῦντες "not knowing something, being ignorant of something; going wrong, making a false step"
- ὁμολογοῦντες "agreeing with, saying the same thing as"
- κακῶς ἐκδεχόμενοι "take or understand in a bad or evil sense"
- νομίζουσιν "(they) believe"
- "like those who are ignorant or those who don't agree with us or those who believe wrongly."
 - This seems to me to be a shot directly at the Platonists, Cyrenaics, Peripatetics, and others who tried to slander and mischaracterize the students of the Garden.

131j. ἀλλὰ τὸ μῆτε ἀλγεῖν κατὰ σῶμα μῆτε ταραττεσθαι κατὰ ψυχὴν·

- σῶμα "one's body; one's material life in the physical world"
- ταραττεσθαι < τᾶρᾶττω, Attic form of ταρασσῶ (tarassō) "trouble, disturb, upset"

- τάραττεσθαι (Attic form) < τάραττεσθαι (middle/passive infinitive)
- This word is connected to ἀταραξία (ataraxia) < ἀ- (a- "not") + τάρασσω (tarássō "trouble, disturb") + -ία
- "but that which neither pains the body (σῶμα sōma) nor troubles the mind (ψυχὴν psychēn)."

Look at that! We're at the end of another verse! We're covered a lot of ground, so it's time to pull it all together.

A simple meal of hearty, wholesome bread and spring water delivers the most extreme pleasure whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst; and, when extravagant experiences do come up every once in a while, they are experienced more intensely by us, and we are better able to fearlessly face the vicissitudes of fortune.

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say the pleasure of those who are prodigal and those stuck in taking delight (only) in kinetic pleasures like those who are ignorant, those who don't agree with us, or those who believe wrongly; but we mean that which neither pains the body nor troubles the mind.

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Post by "Cassius" of October 26, 2024 at 2:33 PM

Don't I think our different perspective there parallels our different perspective on [PD10](#). I don't think the passage can be reconciled with the rest of the philosophy without acknowledging that sensual pleasures are pleasure too. Therefore I think the danger is on the other side - that of reading this passage as a blanket condemnation of sensual pleasures - which I think is in fact the way a lot of people are interpreting it so as to arrive at an ascetic interpretation of Epicurus.

Discussing this is very helpful cause I agree this is a critical issue.

Post by "Cassius" of October 26, 2024 at 2:56 PM

Also: While I do think it is most clear to a modern reader to add in the "only," if we put the issue in a clearly philosophical context, such as the heap analogy, then the "only" isn't strictly necessary.

A heap "is not" any of the individual grains of sand that compose it. That can also be said as "A heap is not only the individual grains of sand that compose it, the heap is the combination of the grains of sand." I think that's the Epicurean position on the sorites question, and the reason for him saying that he would not know the good *without* the sensual pleasures. If someone understands that then the discussion we're having right now never comes up. But that's the problem, people are not thinking in terms of the sorites/heap issue. They are thinking generally from their preconceived Platonic/Humanist perspective that sensual issues are "bad," so they jump to conclude that that is what Epicurus is saying.

So I would say that it's not strictly necessary to say "Pleasure is not *only* the pleasures of sensuality and of the profligate...." because if you realize the the term "pleasure" is meant conceptually, then you automatically read into the sentence an understanding that the concept of pleasure is not identical with any individual pleasure -- you understand that as a matter of logic just like you understand that a heap is not the same as its parts. But very few ordinary people think that way, so they probably need the "only."

The real erroneous interpretation in my view is not that of adding in the "only," but in failing to see that the sentence structure makes clear that the blanket term "pleasure" is not *identical* with *any* particular pleasure. Once that is established then the meaning can be communicated in many ways. So I would say that the main error to be avoided would be any reading that separates "sensual pleasures" out of a list of "approved pleasures" as very many commentators today are doing. That interpretation sounds like "Pleasure does not include the pleasures of sensuality or the profligates," which I would maintain is clearly wrong.

Yes Epicurus was different from the Cyreniacs, but he was not different because he subtracted sensual pleasures from a list of approved pleasures, he was expanding the Cyreniac list of pleasures to include experiences that they did not consider to be pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of October 26, 2024 at 3:05 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I don't think that's what Cassius is saying either, but I want to make it clear that - from what I read here in this text and elsewhere - Epicurus is not endorsing the "sex, drugs,

and rock n roll" lifestyle of the ἄσωτος (Read the quote from my commentary on that word below). Did Epicurus engage in drinking, revelry, etc.? Sure, I got no problem with that. Did he go on binges of drinking to find himself hungover and nauseated? Definitely not, as far as I'm concerned.

Good point that the same question pops up here. I think (as you say) that both you and I *DO* endorse the pleasures of sex, rock'n'roll, and (sometimes) drugs 😊 So we could never accept an interpretation that these are blanketly forbidden. As you said, it's the overindulgence in these, or any other pleasure, even ice cream, that is the problem.

So the real problem is that the sentence as translated has a truncated structure that leaves it ambiguous in English as written, and it demands commentary, or else it will be exhibit number one - which it is what it has become - for those who make Epicurus out to be an ascetic.

Post by “Don” of October 26, 2024 at 5:51 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the passage can be reconciled with the rest of the philosophy without acknowledging that sensual pleasures are pleasure too.

Fully agree on this point! No disagreement here.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Therefore I think the danger is on the other side - that of reading this passage as a blanket condemnation of sensual pleasures

I'll admit there's a danger of over-generalization here on the part of some (most?) readers. Even so, I don't read it as a condemnation of sensual pleasures. However, I read it as a warning that the pleasures over-indulged in by the prodigal are not choice-worthy *IF* those are the only pleasures you are experiencing AND the only pleasures you value are the those indulged in by those Epicurus would call ἄσωτος = (literally) not saved, abandoned; debauched, dissolute; profligate, spendthrift; and also extravagant, lavish, profuse, spend-thrift, wasteful. This ALL circles back to Epicurus' ideas like:

U490 He who needs tomorrow least, most gladly greets the coming day.

VS59 The stomach is not insatiable, as most people say; instead the opinion that the stomach needs unlimited filling is false.

From these, I see Epicurus saying that the person who doesn't feel the need to eat and drink lavishly continuously, better appreciates it and enjoys when the opportunity arises. If you live lavishly and indulge in ONLY extravagant physical pleasures, you'll get bored, nauseated, sick, lose friends, etc.

Post by “Don” of October 26, 2024 at 8:31 PM

Lest anyone think I'm a prude or stuck in the mud we're out at our local brewery this evening, listening to some fine music, and enjoying quality local brews.



PS I thought [Cassius](#) might appreciate that. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of October 27, 2024 at 7:20 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

listening to some fine music, and enjoying quality local brews.

Ah those sensual pleasures! 😊