

Episode 270 - Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time

Post by "Cassius" of February 20, 2025 at 6:58 AM

Welcome to Episode 270 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 discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

We are continuing our series of key doctrines of Epicurus, and this week and next week we are focusing on the Epicurean view that "[Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time](#)."

This is currently discussed here in our wiki:

[Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time](#)

And our new Discussion Guide will be here:

[Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time](#)

Preliminary Notes:

This is a difficult series of doctrines and a difficult episode, so I will add some notes while editing it.

The two key resources for today's episode will be, in addition to the PD's:

1 - David Sedley's "Epicurean vs Cyreniac Happiness, linked in [Don's post below](#)

2 - Cicero's On Ends Book 2 Section 27:

Quote

Reid - XXVII. But we dwell too long upon very simple matters. When we have once concluded and demonstrated that if every- thing is judged by the standard of pleasure,

no room is left for either virtues or friendships, there is nothing besides on which- we need greatly insist. And yet, lest it should be thought that any passage is left without reply, I will now also say a few words in answer to the remainder of your speech. Well then, whereas the whole importance of philosophy lies in its bearing on happiness, and it is from a desire for happiness alone that men have devoted themselves to this pursuit, and whereas some place happiness in one thing, some in another, while you place it in pleasure, and similarly on the other side all wretchedness you place in pain, let us first examine the nature of happiness as you conceive it. Now you will grant me this, I suppose, that happiness, if only it exists at all, ought to lie entirely within the wise man's own control. For if the life of happiness may cease to be so, then it cannot be really happy. Who indeed has any faith that a thing which is perishable and fleeting will in his own case always continue solid and strong? But he who feels no confidence in the permanence of the blessings he possesses, must needs apprehend that he will some time or other be wretched, if he loses them. Now no one can be happy while in alarm about his most important possessions; no one then can possibly be happy. For happiness is usually spoken of not with reference to some period of time, but to permanence, nor do we talk of the life of happiness at all, unless that life be rounded off and complete, nor can a man be happy at one time, and wretched at another; since any man who judges that he can become wretched will never be happy. For when happiness has been once entered on, it is as durable as wisdom herself, who is the creator of the life of happiness, nor does it await the last days of life, as Herodotus writes that Solon enjoined upon Croesus. 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. 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.

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/64762665/media>

Post by “Cassius” of February 21, 2025 at 9:23 PM

Update:

I think we have most of the sources we need for our recording of Episode 269 this coming Sunday on the full meaning of Pleasure, absence of pain, etc., because we discuss that frequently. We'll probably have all the material we can handle if we just touch on what is discussed [here](#).

But for the final Episode 270, the final episode in this series, we're dealing with the very challenging "unlimited time contains no greater pleasure than limited time if we measure the limits of pleasure by reason" doctrine.

I think we can deal with that as well based on what Epicurus himself says and our understanding of pleasure, but I don't recall seeing much academic or outside commentary on this point beyond what DeWitt has to say about it in his chapter on "the new hedonism."

If anyone is aware of academic or commentary discussion specifically on [PD18](#), 19, or 20, please post in this thread so we can consider including that in this episode. As I find more material I too will post it here or in the [discussion guide for this episode](#).

Post by “Don” of February 22, 2025 at 7:51 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

You really have to read 18 through 21 as one chapter in [Principal Doctrines](#) and not as discrete sayings. They hold together and expand on each other and the divisions are not part of the original text anyway.

(Using Saint-Andre translation)

As soon as the pain produced by the lack of something is removed, pleasure in the flesh is not increased but only embellished. Yet the limit of enjoyment in the mind is produced by reasoning out these very things and similar things, which once provoked the greatest fears in the mind. Infinite time and finite time hold an equal amount of pleasure, if we measure the limits of that pleasure by reason. The flesh assumes that the limits of joy are infinite, and that infinite joy can be produced only through infinite time. But the mind, reasoning out the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life and therefore has no need of infinite time; yet the mind does not flee from joy, nor when events cause it to exit from life does it look back as if it has missed any aspect of the best life. One who perceives the limits of life knows how easy it is to expel the pain produced by a lack of something and to make one's entire life complete; so that there is no need for the things that are achieved through struggle.

Post by “Cassius” of February 22, 2025 at 8:28 AM

Yes I agree they all read together very well, and there are a number of good translations.

And it does make some degree of sense on its face and in context with the rest of the philosophy.

What I don't recall is seeing a lot of academic commentary or other / later Epicureans picking up on the point and giving analogies or illustrations. If anyone has come across additional commentary that would help, be sure to post that too.

Especially the "therefore has no need of infinite time, yet the mind does not flee from joy..."

It seems to me that going into detail and explaining the time factor is the most challenging aspect.

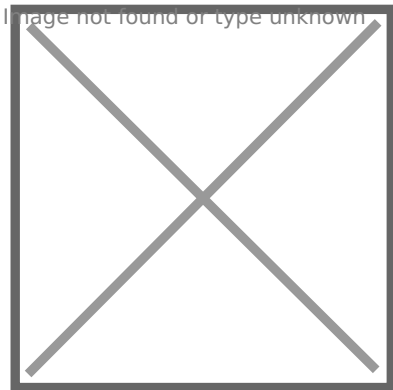
I would like to be able to incorporate what Sedley or similar have said on that, if possible.

Post by “Don” of February 22, 2025 at 9:23 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

Would these help?

https://www.academia.edu/download/34124740/epicurus_apeiron_proofs.pdf



[Epicurus on Death and the Duration of Life](#)

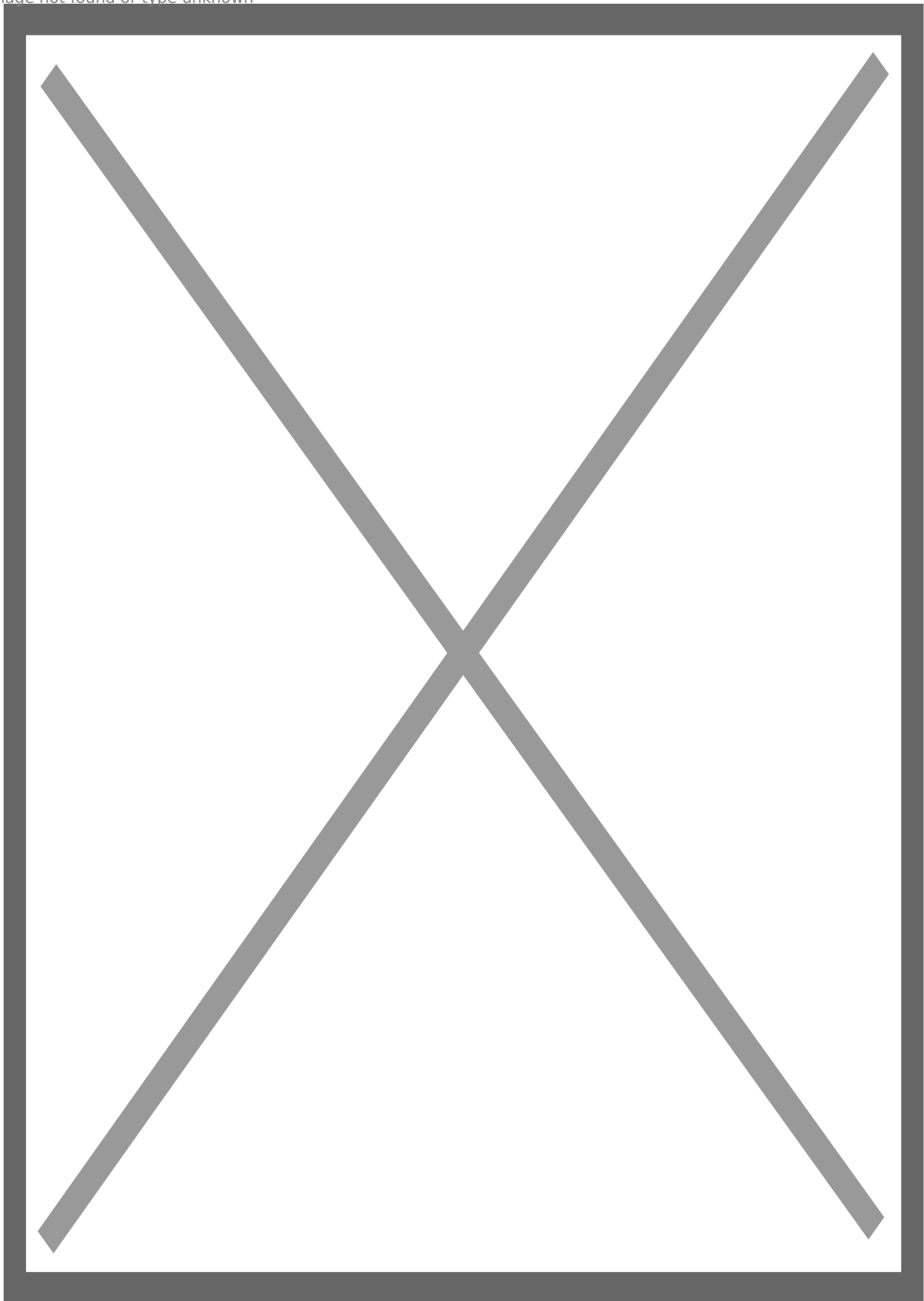
Eds. John J. Cleary and Daniel C. Shartin, Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy vol.4 (1989) pp. 303-322.

www.academia.edu

Post by “Joshua” of February 22, 2025 at 9:55 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

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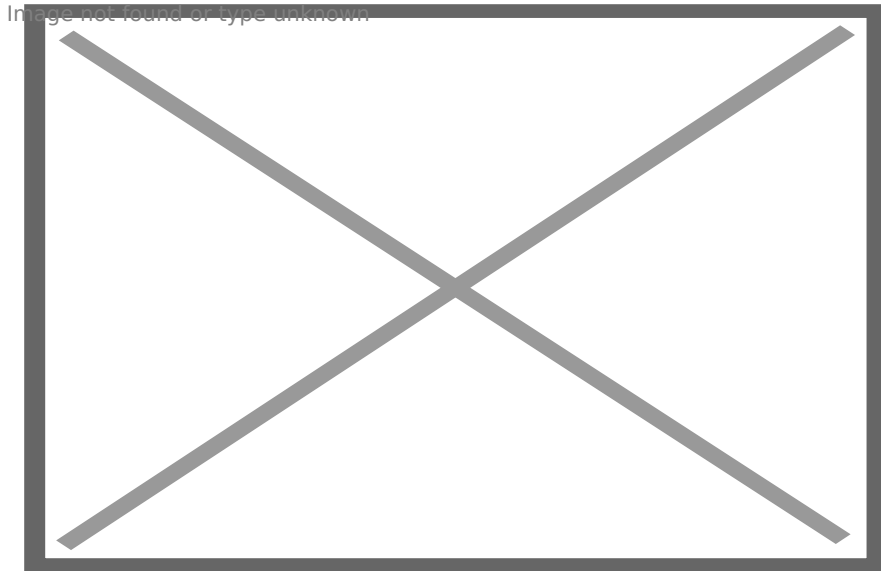
[Carpe Diem: Odes 1:11 - Horace — COONEYCLASSICS](#)

Everyone knows the phrase “Carpe Diem,” or “seize the day,” but did you know where it comes from? The well-known Roman poet, Horace, gave the phrase its...

www.cooneyclassics.org

Horace's 11th ode gives us the phrase *carpe diem*, and a great many others carried the theme.

Usually it involves the speaker of the poem trying to seduce a woman;

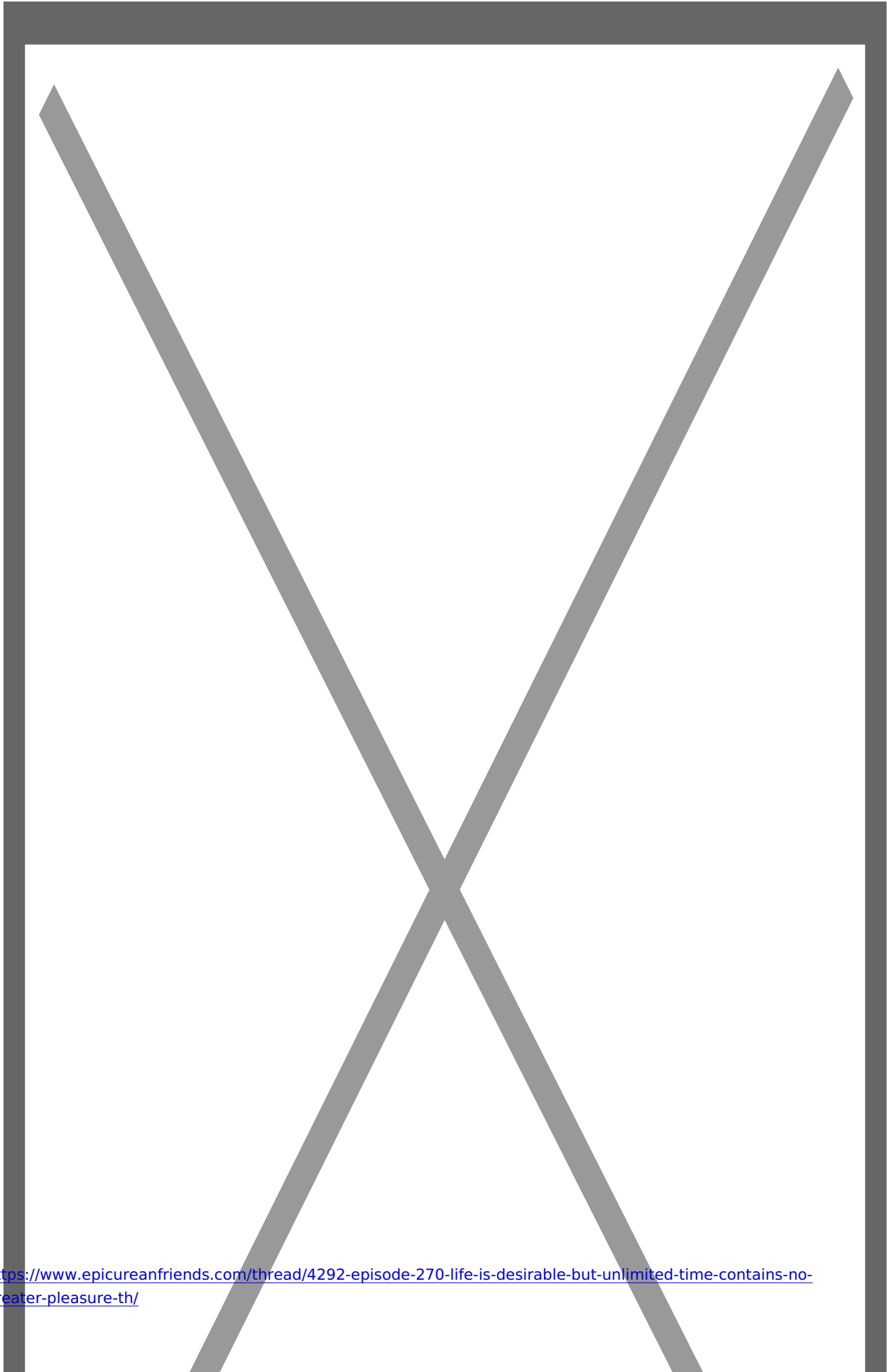


[To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time](#)

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may, Old Time is still a-flying; And this same flower that smiles today Tomorrow will be dying. The glorious lamp of heaven,...

www.poetryfoundation.org

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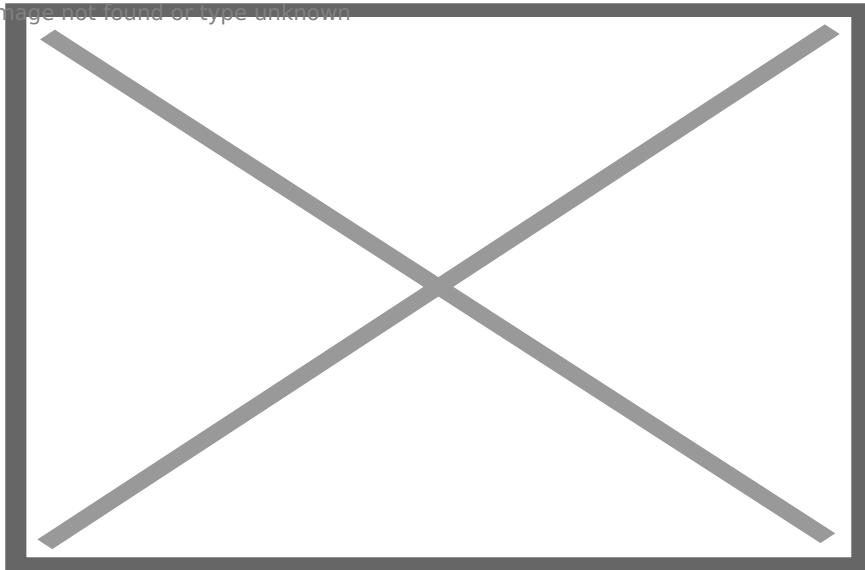
<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

[The Flea](#)

Mark but this flea, and mark in this, How little that which thou deniest me is; It sucked me first, and now sucks thee, And in this flea our two bloods mingled...

www.poetryfoundation.org

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[To His Coy Mistress](#)

My vegetable love should grow Vaster than empires and more slow; An hundred years should go to praise Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze; Two hundred to...

www.poetryfoundation.org

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 9:56 AM

Thanks don! that title on the second one looks great and i will look into both!

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 10:08 AM

Yes, from the Mitsis article, this is what I want to argue against - specifically, the position such as taken by Furley that "no surviving Epicurean text offers a defense for this strongly counter-intuitive claim"

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

Notoriously, however, the Epicurean strongly denies that death in any way diminishes life's pleasures by cutting them short. To many, this has seemed merely perverse. David Furley, for example, dismisses this feature of Epicurus' theory as "dogma without argument" and denies that any surviving Epicurean text offers a defense for this strongly counter-intuitive claim.⁴ A related objection is raised by Cicero in *De Finibus* ii. Cicero complains that nothing, in fact, could be more at odds with Epicurus' own hedonism than the claim that death involves no loss or deprivation of hedonic goods (ii 87-88; cf. Plutarch, *Non posse* 1106bff.). If pleasurable states are what make us happy, Cicero insists, surely we will be happier if we can remain in these states longer. Thus, he wonders, how can death fail to be an evil for Epicureans, if it prevents them from being happy for a longer period of time?

Post by "Don" of February 22, 2025 at 10:34 AM

My interpretation of this whole concept is that it is specifically the *fear* of death that makes us unable to take pleasure in the life we have here and now.

We cannot *be* dead. We can't experience death. As Epicurus says, when death is, we are not. No one *is* dead. My father is not *dead*. He no longer exists. I have my memories and there are those memories held be family and friends. Death is not a state of existence.

Another aspect is Epicurus' unflinching facing up to our mortality, indeed the mortality of everyone and everything, including the cosmos itself. The Universe is eternal, but everything within it is always changing, evolving, dissolving, rearranging. We may want infinite time, may desire it, may long for it. We are not going to get it. We're dying at some point, and then we won't exist. Saying that death deprives us of experiences, while true, but I also cannot experience 2nd c Greece or the 24th c settlements on Titan. Proximity in time to my life whether in the past, future, or the day right before or after my first or last breath has no impact on what I experience here and now.

I cannot have infinite time. Longing for it robs me of pleasure during my one and only life.

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 10:35 AM

Again, Don thank you because that article leads to finding what Sedley and Long say on this. Unfortunately Mitsis disagrees with Long and Sedley and finds their argument deficient.

So once again I find myself disagreeing with those who disagree with Sedley 😊 Here is Mitsis's summary of the Long and Sedley position - for example even in the first sentence here - I would say Mitsis is wrong in saying that duration is "unimportant." So Mitsis is defending Cicero's view and Sedley attacks Cicero:

Quote

In closing, I want to return briefly to Epicurus' claim about the unimportance of duration in rational assessments of the overall pleasantness of our lives (KD 19-21). Cicero takes Epicurus to be clearly (though wrongly) denying that pleasure is increased by duration (*voluptatem crescere longinquitate*) or rendered more valuable by its continuance (*De Fin. ii 83*). Recently, several scholars have resisted Cicero's interpretation because they take Epicurus to be claiming something much less bewildering about the role of duration in our evaluation of pleasures. Long and Sedley, for instance, argue that Epicurus does not mean to assert that time has no bearing at all in assessing quantities of pleasure. Rather, in their view, he is claiming that we can experience the same level of pleasure in a finite or infinite time.³⁶ Pleasure is something with clear natural limits and we can reach these limits as soon as we understand them sufficiently. Epicurus is thus merely observing that we do not need an infinite amount of time to come to such an understanding; nor could any particular complete experience of pleasure reach more intense levels, even if we repeated it an infinite number of times.

On this interpretation, Epicurus must still admit that death can cut short and hence harm the happiness of mortals enjoying even these most complete levels of pleasure. He might therefore readily acknowledge that a long, happy life is preferable to a short, happy one. Long's and Sedley's reading has obvious attractions inasmuch as it leaves Epicurus with a much less paradoxical claim to defend

So Mitsis thinks that Epicurus would not say that if one has an option to choose between a long happy life and a short happy one he would choose the longer?

Sorry Phil, i have to go with Long and Sedley on that one!

I think Mitsis is flatly wrong in saying that duration is of no significance to happiness. The longer is not NECESSARILY greater, because there are other factors that can come into play (intensity and parts of the body) but that doesn't mean that time is irrelevant.

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 10:37 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

My interpretation of this whole concept is that it is specifically the fear of death that makes us unable to take pleasure in the life we have here and now.

While I think that is very important and very true, there's also the separate question of the benefit of duration which I don't think is answered by the issue of fear.

It's a legitimate question to ask, separate and apart from fear of loss: Does longer length of time necessarily make something preferable?

Post by "Don" of February 22, 2025 at 10:51 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

It's a legitimate question to ask, separate and apart from fear of loss: Does longer length of time necessarily make something preferable?

It's not necessarily fear of loss alone. It's fear of the unknown: Will I be punished when I'm dead? Will I be aware of anything?

The only duration that means anything is the duration in this life. Less pain/more pleasure for longer time *in this life* is preferable. Talking about what could have been after one dies is pointless.

Whether a person dies young or dies old, a person dies, one can't say "Oh they could have seen/done etc.." Yes, maybe they could have gotten married, seen their grandchildren, etc. Yes. They could also have gotten cancer, broken their neck and become paralyzed, gotten drunk and killed someone while driving, etc. The "death is loss" crowd seems to often talk of positive pleasurable experiences but never talks about negative painful experiences that could have been experienced.

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 11:14 AM

Ha --- I am trying to move the discussion beyond "Fear" which is not at all the only thing I think Epicurus was concerned about 😊

If we're looking for practical analysis to drive our choices and avoidances, we need a clear picture of the role that time/duration plays in that analysis. Because it surely plays some, or Epicurus would not have mentioned it in [PD09](#).

Surely most everyone will agree that duration plays some role in deciding what to pursue and what to avoid, right?

Well, if so, we need an analysis of that decision which does not end with "duration of time makes NO difference" - because I can certainly tell the difference between a minute and a year. And not simply because I am *afraid* of opportunities lost.

Post by “Joshua” of February 22, 2025 at 11:23 AM

I still tend to think Epicurus was responding to Plato's [Philebus](#) in his discussion of limits, duration, and death. I'll have to review that dialogue.

Post by “Cassius” of February 22, 2025 at 11:41 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

I still tend to think Epicurus was responding to Plato's [Philebus](#) in his discussion of limits, duration, and death. I'll have to review that dialogue.

Yes, that I think is the ultimate answer. "Limit" has multiple meanings and so does any variation of "greater." Unless you add something extra such as "in every respect" then it's going to be a very fair reading to acknowledge that what you're saying is "greater" is *not* greater "in every respect." What Epicurus is talking about is the limit of Pleasure, but pleasure has many aspects, of which one is time, and not all pleasures are equal in time or in many other respects.

And that's where you come back to what Epicurus said to Menoecus that just as the wise man does not choose the most food, but the most pleasant food, the wise man does not choose the longest life, but the most pleasant.

That right there is a clear illustration. The food the wise man chooses is better to him, but not more in quantity, and the time the wise man chooses more pleasant for him, but not longer in time.

But the difference in quantity of food and length of time is not physically abolished by the choice of the wise man. The wise man is simply intentionally choosing to ignore the quantity difference and the time difference. because he has mentally chosen to recognize that the pleasantness is more important to him than the extra time or the extra quantity.

So that's why I think Long and Sedley are clearly correct: Epicurus would recognize that length of time is something that can definitely be desirable, but it is not the overriding factor. The overriding factor is what you choose to feel and recognize as the most pleasant for you. The mind can influence what it finds pleasurable even more than can the body.

So it is perfectly proper to say "infinite time contains no greater time than finite time" on the grounds that the "greater" you are talking about is what you deem to be "the most pleasant." What is "most pleasant" for you is something that you can choose to recognize as something that doesn't necessarily get better with significantly more time.

One example is standing on the tip of the mountaintop - the more time you spend there the less you're likely to want to stay.

So I would say too that this is why Epicurus is saying several times that you get to this recognition through "reason" and through "the mind." The body itself is not able to figure this out, nor is someone who doesn't have the benefit of Epicurean philosophy and who thinks that unlimited time will necessarily allow him to reach greater heights of pleasure.

To repeat what I agreed with Don earlier, this view of duration totally gets rid of fear, and that's very important. But not everyone is as subject to "fear" as are others, and it is perfectly legitimate and in fact natural when you are young to take the position - "I am not afraid of death or anything else -- I simply want to understand how to spend my life."

And Epicurus has the answer that "time" or "duration" is not at all the overriding factor in making your choices. You can in fact live like "a god among men" not only because you not afraid of death, but because you are confident that you are able to obtain whatever is the greatest pleasure for you in the time that you have.

Post by “Don” of February 22, 2025 at 11:52 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Well, if so, we need an analysis of that decision which does not end with "duration of time makes NO difference" - because I can certainly tell the difference between a minute and a year. And not simply because I am afraid of opportunities lost.

Of course, duration *in this life* matters. Epicurus talks about a life *filled* with pleasure. That's both physically and temporally. We live akin to the gods when we live in pleasure.

My grievance (?) is with those who only talk about the loss of pleasure *if* or *when* one dies. We, the living, have NO idea what a life unlived had in store for the person who died. Chances are it wouldn't have been all wine and roses. Our own lives have some pain, but we're living. *Life is meant to be lived, as pleasurable as possible*. What about the pain the person who died would have experienced? What about the potential misfortunes? Focusing on the "what might have" is pointless. Epicurean philosophy stresses that the bite of pain of someone dying is real. But the philosophy also says not to dwell on the loss but to celebrate and remember the life.

Let's be honest though. For the person who dies, death is a loss *of life*. That's it. You're done. That is the end of all sensation and feeling and experience. But I still don't see how we can say *what* they've missed or *what* they potentially could have experienced. Would their life have been overwhelming pain within a day of their actual death date? Would they have died a day later? A week? Ten years? There is no way to know. What we do know is that we're mortal and that is never going to change. I don't believe we'll ever be able to upload ourselves nor do I think that would be preferable to actually dying.

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 1:33 PM

Another way to ask this is : Is Cicero summarizing Epicurus accurately here?

Quote

Cicero takes Epicurus to be clearly (though wrongly) denying that pleasure is increased by duration (*voluptatem crescere longinquitate*) or rendered more valuable by its continuance (*De Fin. ii 83*).

In other words, did Epicurus in fact deny that pleasure is increased by duration or rendered more valuable by its continuance?

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 1:51 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

Of course Mr. Mitsos could be being unfair to Cicero. Let's see what De Finibus ii 83 says:

EDIT - looks like it's 88, not 83.

The Loeb / Rackham translation of that is:

"It may be enjoined that Epicurus, as you yourself were saying, maintains that long duration can not add anything to happiness, and that as much pleasure is enjoyed in a brief span of time as if pleasure were everlasting."

which appears to come from the underlined part below:

[88] haec dicuntur inconstantissime. cum enim summum bonum in voluptate ponat, negat infinito tempore aetatis voluptatem fieri maiorem quam finito atque modico. qui bonum omne in virtute ponit, is potest dicere perfici beatam vitam perfectione virtutis; negat enim summo bono afferre incrementum diem. qui autem voluptate vitam effici beatam putabit, qui sibi is conveniet, si negabit voluptatem crescere longinquitate? igitur ne dolorem quidem. an dolor longissimus quisque miserrimus, voluptatem non optabiliorem diuturnitas facit? quid est igitur, cur ita semper deum appellet Epicurus beatum et aeternum? dempta enim aeternitate nihilo beatior Iuppiter quam Epicurus; uterque enim summo bono fruitur, id est voluptate. 'At enim hic etiam dolore.' At eum nihili facit; ait enim se, si uratur, 'Quam hoc suave!' dicturum.

Post by "Don" of February 22, 2025 at 2:00 PM

I have to go back to PD9

If every pleasure were condensed and were present at the same time and in the whole of one's nature or its primary parts, then the pleasures would never differ from one another.

Εἰ κατεπυκνοῦτο πᾶσα ἡδονή, καὶ χρόνῳ καὶ περὶ ὅλον τὸ ἄθροισμα ὑπῆρχεν ἢ τὰ κυριώτατα μέρη τῆς φύσεως, οὐκ ἂν ποτε διέφερον ἀλλήλων αἱ ἡδοναί.

But pleasures can't be condensed and present at the same time, therefore they differ in time/duration and what parts are affected.

However, every pleasure is the same in that they are pleasurable. That might be the thing that's getting conflated.

That said, IF one is filled entirely with pleasure, different pleasures provide variety but not more pleasure. So, the fact that they differ in variety also means they differ in duration and parts affected.

Post by “Cassius” of February 22, 2025 at 2:09 PM

Don I agree with everything you just wrote.

So if we accept Rackham's translation, which I am not sure we should) that "Epicurus, as you yourself were saying, maintains that long duration can not add anything to happiness, and that as much pleasure is enjoyed in a brief span of time as if pleasure were everlasting."

What should we say to someone who says something like:

Epicurus is denying that pleasure is increased by duration or rendered more valuable by its continuance.

Post by “Joshua” of February 22, 2025 at 2:37 PM

Quote

Epicurus, as you yourself were saying, maintains that long duration can not add anything to happiness, and that as much pleasure is enjoyed in a brief span of time as if pleasure were everlasting.

I have to say, this does not appear to me to be a very literal translation. I'll look into this.

Post by “Don” of February 22, 2025 at 2:58 PM

FWIW... clunky Google Translate

88] These things are said most inconsistently. For when he places the highest good in pleasure, he denies that pleasure can be greater in an infinite period of life than in a finite and limited

one. He who places all good in virtue can say that a happy life is perfected by the perfection of virtue; for he denies that the highest good brings increase day by day. But he who will think that pleasure can make life happy, who will he be if he denies that pleasure increases with length? Therefore, not even pain. Does the longest pain make any miserable person, and duration makes pleasure less desirable? What is it, then, why does Epicurus always call God thus happy and eternal? For, taking away eternity, Jupiter is in no way happier than Epicurus; for both enjoy the highest good, that is, pleasure. 'But for here also pain.' But he makes him nothing; for he says that if he were to burn, he would say, 'How sweet this is!'

Post by "Joshua" of February 22, 2025 at 3:18 PM

That looks substantially more complete, thank you [Don!](#)

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 3:30 PM

Here's the [Reid edition](#), which we used in the podcast because it seemed more literal.

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.

More context:

XXVII. But we dwell too long upon very simple matters. When we have once concluded and demonstrated that if every- thing is judged by the standard of pleasure, no room is left for either virtues or friendships, there is nothing besides on which- we need greatly insist. And yet, lest it should be thought that any passage is left without reply, I will now also say a few words in answer to the remainder of your speech. Well then, whereas the whole importance of philosophy lies in its bearing on happiness, and it is from a desire for happiness alone that men have devoted themselves to this pursuit, and whereas some place happiness in one thing, some in another, while you place it in pleasure, and similarly on the other side all wretchedness

you place in pain, let us first examine the nature of happiness as you conceive it. Now you will grant me this, I suppose, that happiness, if only it exists at all, ought to lie entirely within the wise man's own control. For if the life of happiness may cease to be so, then it cannot be really happy. Who indeed has any faith that a thing which is perishable and fleeting will in his own case always continue solid and strong? But he who feels no confidence in the permanence of the blessings he possesses, must needs apprehend that he will some time or other be wretched, if he loses them. Now no one can be happy while in alarm about his most important possessions; no one then can possibly be happy. For happiness is usually spoken of not with reference to some period of time, but to permanence, nor do we talk of the life of happiness at all, unless that life be rounded off and complete, nor can a man be happy at one time, and wretched at another; since any man who judges that he can become wretched will never be happy. For when happiness has been once entered on, it is as durable as wisdom herself, who is the creator of the life of happiness, nor does it await the last days of life, as Herodotus writes that Solon enjoined upon Croesus. 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. 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.

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 3:34 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

Joshua the passage that Cicero states right after the part that we are quoting bolsters the argument that this entire discussion is related to the [Philebus](#) argument.

Cicero is essentially arguing exactly what Plato argued: that virtue can be the good because it has a limit (it can be "consummated") while pleasure cannot be the good *because it has no limit; it can always be made better (by adding more)*.

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.

Epicurus is responding to Plato by saying that pleasure does have a limit, and that limit is reached when your experience is "full" of pleasures with no mixture of pains.

Epicurus' argument is not any more guilty of gamesmanship with words than is the Stoic argument that the virtuous man is purely virtuous. The Stoics still have to point to individual people and individual cases of people pursuing virtuous activities, and Epicurus still has to point to individual people and individual cases of people pursuing pleasurable activities. But the words provide a model which is understandable and serves as a target to work to achieve.

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 3:41 PM

In other words, the reason we're having this discussion is not because Epicurus wanted to argue that there's no difference between a long pleasant life and a short pleasant life.

We're having the discussion because Epicurus wanted to show how pleasure can be viewed as having a limit - an utmost point that can be reached. In the case of virtue they've defined their utmost point as "pure virtue" -- virtue with no mixture of sin; good with no mixture of evil.

In the case of Epicurus's argument he has defined the utmost point as "pure pleasure." Pure Pleasure with no mixture of pain.

In both cases the utmost point is theoretical. It's a description using generalized words that tells you nothing about what specific activities the person being considered is actually doing with their time to reach the point of pure virtue or pure pleasure. The only thing you can say about whatever activities the "Virtuous" person is engaged in is that they are virtuous. The only thing you can say about whatever activities the "Pleasurable" person is engaged in is that those activities are pleasurable.

There's nothing wrong with this analysis as long as you admit that it's a purely logical and philosophical perspective. The real person in the real world still has to make specific decisions about what virtues to pursue and what pleasures to pursue. But this kind of analysis does give you a logical framework to organize your thoughts, and that is very valuable.

Post by "Don" of February 22, 2025 at 3:59 PM

Google Translate again:

But for, as you were saying, Epicurus denies that the length of time contributes anything to living happily, nor that less pleasure is perceived in the shortness of time than if it were eternal.

I wanted to break this down:

Epicurus denies that:

1. the length of time contributes anything to living happily

I believe that I could agree with this if it's an accurate translation. You can live a "happy" short life or a "happy" long life. The length of the life doesn't necessarily equate to one's overall happiness.

2. less pleasure is perceived in the shortness of time than if it were eternal.

This again hinges on the impossibility of eternal pleasure. Pleasure, as Cicero conceives of it, is by definition fleeting. He appears to imagine an infinite and eternal banquet. That's not the pleasure Epicurus is working with. It seems to me that "Torquatus" and Cicero are talking past each other, with Cicero of course being the author of the conversation. He's deliberately interpreting Epicurus and Plato via [Philebus](#) for his own ends.

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 4:03 PM

Yes and note the switch in wording between happiness and pleasure, which adds more potential for confusion.

Did not Epicurus say that one can be "happy" even in the bull of phaloris, but that would not mean that the torture itself is pleasurable.

There's a lot of switching going on between general concepts vs particular feelings that has to be taken into account.

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2025 at 4:08 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus denies that:

1. the length of time contributes anything to living happily

I believe that I could agree with this if it's an accurate translation. You can live a "happy" short life or a "happy" long life. The length of the life doesn't necessarily equate to one's overall happiness

Perhaps, but I am not sure there.

I do think Epicurus knew the difference between pleasures that last a short time vs. a long time. But on the other hand, long pleasures are not necessarily the most pleasant. So it really makes a difference how you phrase what it is you are talking about.

Post by "Don" of February 22, 2025 at 4:16 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I do think Epicurus knew the difference between pleasures that last a short time vs. a long time. But on the other hand, long pleasures are not necessarily the most pleasant. So it really makes a difference how you phrase what it is you are talking about.

I didn't see this as referring to individual pleasures. To me it reads as the length of the life itself.

Again, I think Cicero is conveniently switching terms and ideas: pleasure, pleasures, length of life, duration of pleasure, etc.

Post by "Joshua" of February 22, 2025 at 4:26 PM

Quote from Epicurus and His Philosophy, by Norman DeWitt

[Epicurus'] finding is that time is "an accident of accidents," and, if his reasoning be closely scrutinized, time seems to be even less than this.

The line of reasoning may be sketched as follows: a human being is susceptible of sickness but sickness is not a permanent attribute, only a temporary condition, that is, an accident. Sickness in its turn may be long or short, but this quality of length or brevity is not a permanent attribute but an accident. Therefore it is an accident of an accident. Next, by analogy, since we associate time with states of health or sickness, the time of their duration is said to be long or short. Thus long and short become predicates of time while in reality they apply only to states of health or sickness. This amounts to saying that in the phrases "a long time" or "a short time" the adjectives are transferred epithets.

Incidentally, in the text of Epicurus this paragraph on the topic of time follows immediately upon the discussion of attributes and accidents. This juxtaposition confirms the assumption that the prolepsis is rightly interpreted as an anticipatory notion of the essential attributes of the subject of examination.

pp. 147-148

Following this line of thinking moves us firmly into [Bryan's](#) area, so perhaps he can comment.

Page 229 begins the subsection "Pleasure not increased by Immortality", which he ends thus;

Quote

The attainment to this state [the limit of pleasure], he now declares, is a condition of one dimension. He seems to think of it as an Alpinist would regard the ascent of an arduous mountain peak. The pleasure would not be increased by remaining on the peak.

Also, [Cassius](#) :

Quote

So Mitsis thinks that Epicurus would not say that if one has an option to choose between a long happy life and a short happy one he would choose the longer?

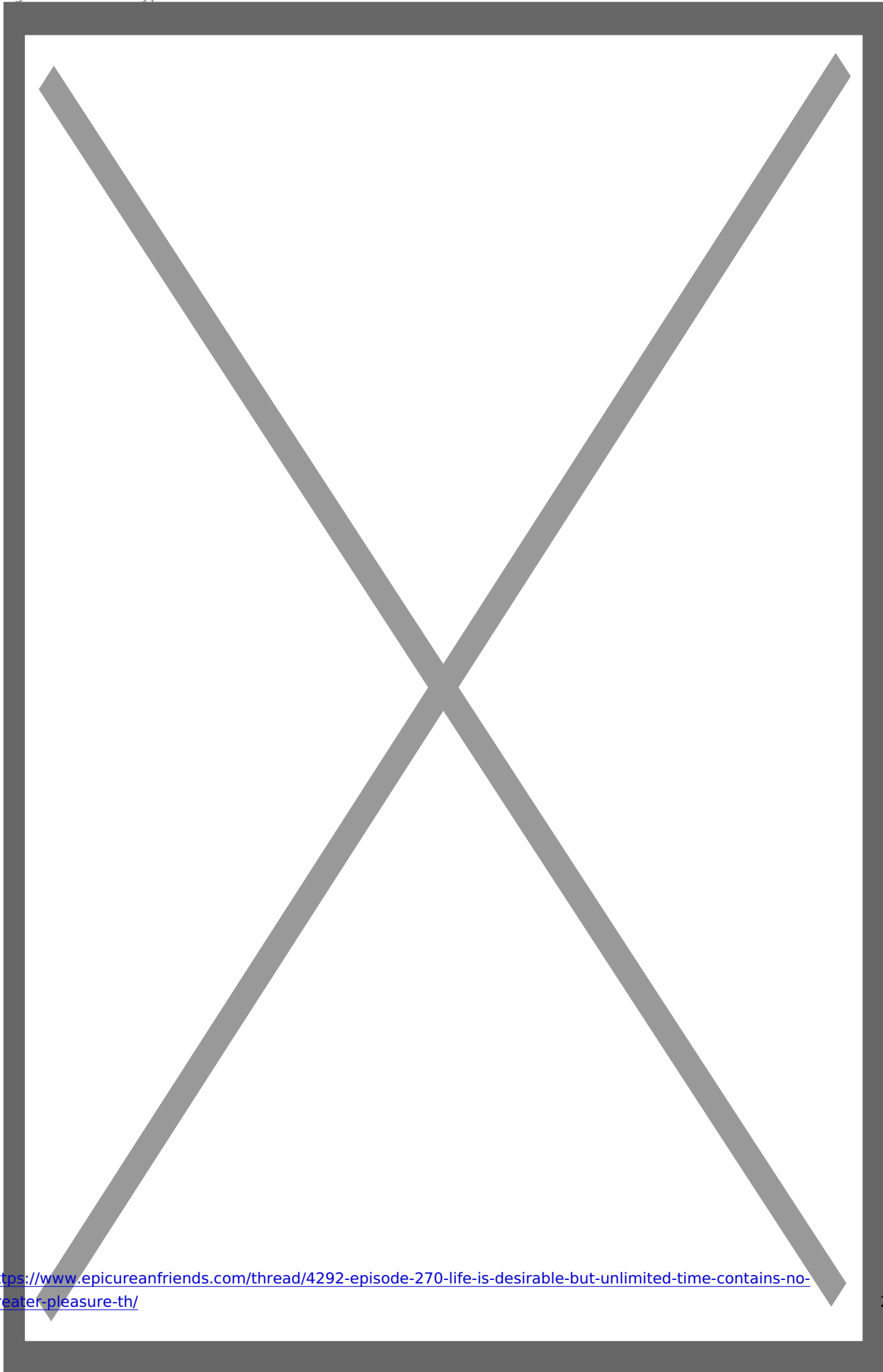
In fairness to Mitsis, I do not think this is his conclusion in the passage you quoted. If anything, Mitsis is saying that Epicurus *would* choose the long happy life over the short happy life, and that this choice involves him in a paradox.

Post by “Joshua” of February 22, 2025 at 4:33 PM

[Cassius](#) have you already consulted Sedley's "*Epicurean vs Cyrenaic Happiness*", published 2016? I haven't seen it referenced in this thread and I think you'll want to take a look at that.

Edit to add;

Image not found or type unknown



<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

[Selfhood and the Soul: Essays on Ancient Thought and Literature in Honour of Christopher Gill](#)

is a collection of new and original essays in honor of Christopher Gill, Emeritus Professor of Ancient Thought at the University of Exeter. All of the essays...

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Post by “Joshua” of February 22, 2025 at 4:39 PM

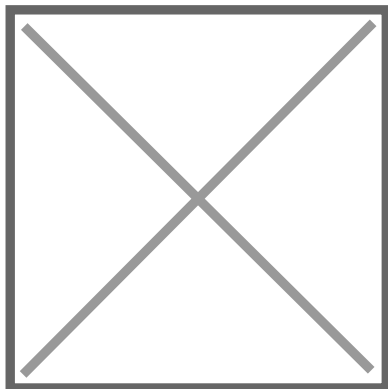
Quote

The first item in the delicate balance to which I referred earlier is, thus, the positive desirability for an Epicurean of extending the duration of pleasure, if possible to the natural length of a full human life. I now turn to the second item. Although staying alive longer is recommended, and may well enhance the blessedness of one’s life, Epicurus is equally committed to the converse principle that dying sooner is in no way an evil. Contrary to a widespread assumption, it could not be an evil, for the simple reason that pain is the only evil, whereas being dead is painless, and therefore hedonically neutral, lacking pleasure and pain alike. It is natural to fear what you consider bad, but not to fear what you consider value-neutral.

-David Sedley, *Epicurean vs Cyrenaic Happiness*

Display More

Post by “Don” of February 22, 2025 at 8:48 PM



[Epicurean versus Cyrenaic happiness](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4292-episode-270-life-is-desirable-but-unlimited-time-contains-no-greater-pleasure-th/>

Post by “Godfrey” of February 23, 2025 at 1:01 AM

I'm catching up on this thread and probably missed a lot, but, at least for me, the title to this thread refers to another shibboleth, and the "answer" is quite simple. (Apologies if I missed this elsewhere in the thread, or if I'm stating the obvious.) My interpretation is based on the following:

[PD09](#): *If every pleasure were condensed and were present at the same time and in the whole of one's nature or its primary parts, then the pleasures would never differ from one another.* (Saint-Andre translation)

Which I read as a confirmation by Epicurus that pleasures have three components: intensity (condensed to the same intensity is how I read this translation of the PD; someone please correct me if the Greek contradicts this), duration, and location in the body/mind. With this in mind, duration is pertinent to consider in evaluating pleasure, along with intensity and location. Pleasures are typically not of the same intensity, duration and/or location, and so they differ from one another in one's experience, even though they are all "pleasure".

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

The only thing that makes this statement even remotely confusing or controversial is the worldview that one bases their reasoning on. In a worldview where life is finite, infinite time does nobody any good. A life is finite, therefore the pleasure possible in that life is finite. Infinite time is irrelevant to a person's life. This is an extremely simple, practical statement and in no way contradicts [PD09](#). In fact, it defines another limit to pleasure in response to Plato. This complements [PD03](#): *The limit of enjoyment is the removal of all pains. Wherever and for however long pleasure is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental distress.* (St-Andre) [PD03](#) and [PD09](#) describe pleasure within a person's lifetime, [PD19](#) compares a life of pleasure to a myth of immortality.

Of course, Cicero and his ilk would never accept such a simple idea as this, as it negates the supernatural and destroys much of their power over other citizens. So they do what they do best: obfuscate, obfuscate, obfuscate.

Post by "Cassius" of February 23, 2025 at 6:22 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

In a worldview where life is finite, infinite time does nobody any good.

Godfrey if I am reading this correctly then I think you are right in the same way as Don's point in several posts above. Pleasures differ from one another in terms of duration, intensity, and parts of the experience that are involved. For a being with a finite life span, infinite time before and after our lives is of only intellectual relevance. Those are correct and important points.

I also agree that this phrasing amounts to a "shibboleth" - a challenge to think more deeply about the problem analogous to "the sun is the size it appears to be."

But I think there is also more that is going on. While it is true that (1) our bodies have finite lifespans and (2) that pleasures differ (which means that we have to choose intelligently among those pleasures), there is still the question of "Is it better to live a longer time than a shorter time?" which needs to be answered.

Epicurus' wording of this section of the PDs can be read productively and be seen to address this, or the section can be read as ridiculous on its face and used to attack Epicurus, as Cicero is doing.

Appearing to assert that "infinite time contains no greater pleasure than finite time" (as if length of time has no bearing on our experience of pleasure), has very much the same effect as appearing to assert that "the sun is the size it appears to be" or that "by pleasure we mean the absence of pain."

These statements are either profoundly helpful if you understand that they are challenging you to reason about these issues properly, or they are ridiculous on their face if you think they mean what people who doesn't understand or accept the way nature really works think they mean.

See what you think when you've read the Sedley article that Don just linked to from Academia.

Post by "Don" of February 23, 2025 at 6:27 AM

Εἰ κατεπυκνοῦτο πᾶσα ἡδονή, καὶ χρόνῳ καὶ περὶ ὅλον τὸ ἄθροισμα ὑπῆρχεν ἢ τὰ κυριώτατα μέρη τῆς φύσεως, οὐκ ἂν ποτε διέφερον ἀλλήλων αἱ ἡδοναί.

Εἰ κατεπυκνοῦτο πᾶσα ἡδονή > "If every pleasure could be condensed"

κατεπυκνοῦτο is an interesting choice.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, Κκ , καταπτερ-όω , καταπυκν-όω](#)

The connotation includes "to stud thickly" or to plant closely together or stars packed together in the sky. Hence, it also means "to force into a small compass, compress, condense." It's almost like saying "If all the stars in the sky could be condensed..." Or "If all the plants in the field could be condensed..."

If every pleasure could be condensed in both body or mind, pleasures would never differ from one another.

Epicurus Wiki has a good commentary:

Quote

Epicurus presents here a logical defense for his belief that the various pleasures are in an important sense independent: if, he hypothesizes, all pleasures could be somehow "condensed", so that their sum total could be experienced all at the same time, then one pleasure would not differ from any other. Yet the pleasures do differ, Epicurus implies, since they cannot be thus condensed -- another syllogism by negative hypothesis, demonstrating that the opposite is in fact true.

The clause *e ta kyriotata...* is somewhat confusing; the disjunctive preposition it begins with does not stand amidst a clear, either/or construction. The logically most plausible reading is that this clause is disjunctive to the earlier holon, meaning that, hypothetically at least, all pleasures could be condensed and thus be experienced by the "entire" human, sentient being, or (alternatively) by the "principal parts of his/her nature". The confusion stems from the (perhaps deliberate) parallel construction, by which the sum total of pleasures is related to the sum total of the sentient human.

Post by "Cassius" of February 23, 2025 at 6:39 AM

"The confusion stems from the (perhaps deliberate) parallel construction, by which the sum total of pleasures is related to the sum total of the sentient human."

I think that's a particularly important observation. I'm not able to validate that it is true from the Greek, but I think that the description of what Epicurus is doing is accurate. It looks to me

like Epicurus is definitely evaluating "the sum total of pleasures" in relation to "the sum total of the sentient human."

To me, the comparison of the "sum total of pleasures" to the "sum total of the sentient human" is the "vessel" analogy. Just as the example is given in the opening of Lucretius Book 6, you can view a human life as a vessel (jar / vase / whatever) and realize that a vessel or a life can only be filled so far with pleasures.

After you pour in pleasures and fill the vessel of life to the rim, you can vary the pleasures by pouring in more pleasures, but some of the existing pleasures will overflow over the rim (the same quantity that you pour in will be expelled). The vessel can never get "more full."

When the "sum total of the sentient being" is full of pleasure, it is full of pleasure, and you can never be more full than full no matter how much time you spend pouring in new pleasures.

Post by "Cassius" of February 23, 2025 at 6:51 AM

I just noticed the abstract to the Sedley article: a very good summary especially the first sentence:

Eudaimonia, happiness, is a property of a whole life, not of some portion of it.

What can this mean for hedonists? For Epicurus, it is made possible by the mind's capacity to enjoy one's whole life from any temporal viewpoint: to relive past pleasures and enjoy future ones in anticipation, importantly including confidence in a serene closure. Enjoying your life is like enjoying a day as a whole, not least its sunset. Although pleasure is increased by greater duration (contrary to a more favoured reading), and premature death therefore better avoided, the finitude of human life as such does not lessen its value, and even a premature death need not prevent a life's being enjoyed as 'complete'. In this chapter, the above interpretation is documented, explained, and contextualized in terms of Epicurus' diametrical opposition to his contemporaries, the Cyrenaics.

Brilliant summary. Flies in the face of much prominent academic orthodoxy. Prompts me again to say that David Sedley is at or near the top of greatest living writers on Epicurus. Without him and a few others we'd have a largely stoicized Epicurean academic world taking the position that duration has no relationship to pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of February 23, 2025 at 7:00 AM

Emily Austin on this point, from her Chapter 14:

Epicurus considers the fear of death one of the greatest impediments to the tranquil life. Deep and persistent fear puts tranquility out of reach. Just to be clear, though, Epicurus is like most people—he really enjoys living, and he’s therefore in no rush to die. Some contemporaries and predecessors of Epicurus did run around telling people that life is bleak, and that death is a welcome reprieve from human suffering, but Epicurus thinks that’s nonsense. The Cyrenaics were a competing hedonistic philosophical school and numbered among them was a man dubbed “Hegesias the Death Persuader” for the power of his argument that life is more painful than pleasant.² Hegesias was reportedly run out of town for his effects on the young. That life is unpleasant is an odd view for a hedonist, and Epicurus felt at pains to deny it.

...

Here again, the importance of limits for psychological well-being plays a role in Epicurus’ claim that happiness does not require more time. He writes that “unlimited time and limited time contain equal amounts of pleasure, if one measures by the limits of reason.”¹⁶ On the surface, this appears false. If our pleasures are additive, then when I combine yesterday’s pleasures with today’s pleasures, I have more pleasures because I have lived longer. That means that the me of today has experienced more pleasure than the me of yesterday. If life were unlimited, then pleasure would be as well.

Epicurus claims, though, that our reason tells us that tranquility is a stable and complete state, not an additive state. Enough is enough at every moment we have it. We do not have more tranquility or more happiness by having it longer. In that sense, we do not have more “enough” tomorrow. We have enough all the time we live. He develops this thought at greater length in *Principal Doctrine 20*.

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2025 at 9:26 AM

I’ll have to look back in the threads for where this was discussed earlier, but Martin reminded me that one way he looks at this is with a “comfortable temperature” analogy, with pleasure in the role of temperature.

Once a comfortable temperature is reached, the temperature does not get more or less comfortable by changing, or remaining in place for a longer period of time.

In this analysis, that would mean that the question of "how long to remain" at a comfortable temperature (whether it is better to remain at a comfortable temperature for a longer time) would need to be answered by other considerations.

Post by "Cassius" of March 2, 2025 at 5:42 PM

As I edit this podcast, if anyone has any recent thoughts on the interplay of these two citations, and why the same word is not used in both places (it appears one implies that the focus is happiness and the other says pleasure), now would be a particularly helpful time to offer them 😊 :

1 Letter to Menoeceus: "We must then meditate on the things that make our happiness, seeing that when that is with us we have all, but when it is absent we do all to win it."

2 On Ends Book One Torquatus: "We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil.

It seems that the ultimate key is expressed in sentences to the effect that "a life of happiness IS a life of pleasure" from at least both Diogenes of Oinoanda and Torquatus. I don't think I have exactly the same statement in Lucretius or Epicurus, but presumably they would say the same thing. We might have something similar in Philodemus, but if so I am unable to cite it.

Any thoughts or cites on pithy ways to summarize this relationship?

Post by "Joshua" of March 3, 2025 at 8:43 PM

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* has many good passages relevant to this question. There are probably more passages than these to examine.

Quote

Casca Indeed, they say the senators to-morrow

Mean to establish Cæsar as a king;
And he shall wear his crown by sea and land,
In every place save here in Italy.

Cassius I know where I will wear this dagger then;
Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius.
Therein, ye gods, you make the weak most strong;
Therein, ye gods, you tyrants do defeat:
Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,
Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron,
Can be retentive to the strength of spirit;
But life, being weary of these worldly bars,
Never lacks power to dismiss itself.
If I know this, know all the world besides,
That part of tyranny that I do bear
I can shake off at pleasure.

[Thunder still]

Casca
So can I:
So every bondman in his own hand bears
The power to cancel his captivity.

Casca Why, he that cuts off twenty years of life
Cuts off so many years of fearing death.

Brutus Grant that, and then is death a benefit:

So we are Cæsar's friends, that have abridg'd

His time of fearing death.

Display More

Post by “Cassius” of March 8, 2025 at 6:40 AM

Episode 270 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today's episode is entitled: "[Life Is Desirable, But Unlimited Time Contains No Greater Pleasure Than Limited Time.](#)"

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/64762665/media>

Post by “Cassius” of March 9, 2025 at 4:21 PM

Dropping a couple of things here for future thought:

1. In Episode 271, looking at Tusculum Disputations Part 1 at 34, we will come across an offhand reference to Epicurus disagreeing with Democritus. Apparently Democritus held that the soul may continue to exist for at least some period of time after death. Cicero points out that the Epicureans made clear their disagreement with Democritus on that point.
2. Democritus apparently tended to think that the only thing "real" is the atoms and void, and that everything else exists only by convention.
3. If we apply point (2) to the soul, then would we be concerned that Democritus held that the soul is not "real" and that the soul continues to exist in atomic form just like the decomposing corpse?
4. It is apparently clear that Epicurus wanted to escape from the skepticism that Democritus' views entailed for important ethical questions.
5. Dropping back to line 449 of Book one of Lucretius (which is presumably a condensation of Epicurus' On Nature), we have the discussion of properties and qualities of atoms and void. Too much to quote here in full, but in summary it looks like the point is that not only the atoms and void are real but also the properties and qualities of things are real. Epicurean theory seems to end up referring to these things as what we call "emergent qualities" and we consider them to be no less real than the atoms:. Quick summary:

1. [1:449] Everything that we can name to exist has attributes that we consider to be properties or events/accidents of that thing. A property is something that cannot be separated from the thing without the thing being destroyed, such as you cannot separate weight from rocks, or heat from fire, or moisture from water, or touch from bodies, or emptiness from void. On the other hand, events/accident can be separated from a thing without destroying it, such as slavery, poverty, riches, freedom, war, and peace can be separated from people without destroying the person himself.
2. [1:464] Time is an example of an event that does not exist by itself, but from our feelings about the motion or stillness of things. For example, consider the Trojan War, which does not exist in itself, but as an event of things that occurred in the past. The people involved in that war are long dead, and the Trojan War is but an event of the people and things that were involved at the time.
3. [1:483] Bodies are therefore not only the atoms that compose them, but thing things that are created when the atoms combine. In the world around us everything is porous, but by reasoning we will see that the atoms themselves are not porous, and from them everything we see is created.
6. Diogenes of Oinoanda emphasis that happiness is a life of pleasure: in Fragment 32: "**Fr. 32** ... [the latter] being as malicious as the former. I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now. If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. **But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?»**, I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, **that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues**, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end. Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.
7. Torquatus in On Ends appears to equate a life of happiness with a life of pleasure
 1. Book 1 Line 32: [32] X. But that I may make plain to you the source of all the mistakes made by those who inveigh against pleasure and eulogize pain, I will unfold the whole system and will set before you the very language held by that great discoverer of truth and that master-builder, if I may style him so, of the life of happiness.
 2. [54] But if the encomium passed even on the virtues themselves, over which the eloquence of all other philosophers especially runs riot, can find no vent unless it be referred to pleasure, and pleasure is the only thing which invites us to the pursuit of itself, and attracts us by reason of its own nature, then there can be no doubt that of all things good it is the supreme and ultimate good, and that a life of happiness means nothing else but a life attended by pleasure.

8. Switching contexts again, most of us agree that Epicurus was experiencing happiness, even on his last day, when he was wracked with pain of kidney disease.
9. Going back to Lucretius, quoting this time from Bailey: [449] For all things that have a name, you will find either properties linked to these two things or you will see them to be their accidents. That is a property which in no case can be sundered or separated without the fatal disunion of the thing, as is weight to rocks, heat to fire, moisture to water, touch to all bodies, intangibility to the void. On the other hand, slavery, poverty, riches, liberty, war, concord, and other things by whose coming and going the nature of things abides untouched, these we are used, as is natural, to call accidents. Even so time exists not by itself, but from actual things comes a feeling, what was brought to a close in time past, then what is present now, and further what is going to be hereafter. And it must be avowed that no man feels time by itself apart from the motion or quiet rest of things.

Based on the above:

1. To what extent would it be appropriate to conclude that Epicurus is considering "happiness" to be an "emergent quality" - an event - of a life of discrete pleasures? In this case I would see happiness as an emergent property of the "event" kind rather than the permanent kind because happiness is not destroyed by the existence of some degree of pain, even by a tremendous amount of pain such as when under torture.
2. The main reason I ask this is to consider whether Epicurus viewed "happiness" as a real thing, distinct from pleasure, by means of being an emergent quality that could not exist without the underlying discrete pleasures (accompanied by pains). Is this comparable to how the human body would not exist but for the existence of the underlying atoms and void? Given Epicurus' intent to correct the errors of Democritus leading toward skepticism and determinism, Epicurus would have been able to employ the relationship between atoms and bodies in physics to describe in ethics how the concept of happiness arises from the experience of discrete pleasures.
3. Would these points be helpful in describing the relationship between happiness and pleasure?

Post by "Pacatus" of March 9, 2025 at 6:30 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

To what extent would it be appropriate to conclude that Epicurus is considering "happiness" to be an "emergent quality"

At one time, I might have considered that – and perhaps need to again. But now (and partly following [Don](#) regarding *hedone* as the natural *telos*) I would regard happiness as just an alternative word to describe the experience (feeling) of pleasure: both in the kinetic and katastematic senses. And I think it is a useful word (especially for a state of *ataraxia*, or any state in which the feelings of pleasure sufficiently outweigh any pain – e.g., as you note, Epicurus on his death bed). That is, I think – in the everyday discourse of “ordinary language” – we understand what someone means when they say they are happy.

In the longer-term sense, *eudaimonia* represents a life of sufficient pleasure (again, both physical and psychological) to outweigh whatever pain (either *ponē* or *tarachē*) a life characterized by more well-being than ill-being – as perceived by the individual. I have no problem calling that a happy life – for me (and, for all the pain and mental suffering, I do).

Again, as long as it is associated with the experience of pleasure, I find it to be an unproblematic description: “happy.” But I don’t see it as anything distinct from pleasure – even as an emergent quality.

With that said, I do recognize that – in philosophical as opposed to “ordinary language” discourse* – more rigor may be required. In which case: pleasure.

* Wittgenstein (in his *Philosophical Investigations*) tended to focus on how academic philosophical discourse could go astray from perfectly good “ordinary” understanding; but everyday discourse might also fail to convey a true understanding in specific cases.

Post by “Joshua” of March 9, 2025 at 6:51 PM

Quote

Apparently Democritus held that the soul may continue to exist for at least some period of time after death.

Perhaps, but as we discussed Democritus' views regarding death are open to interpretation. It's possible that he believed that corpses were capable of perception for a time while the atoms of the soul gradually dissipate after death. Another interpretation holds that Democritus was only commenting on 'apparent corpses', bodies that seem dead to all appearances but still cling to life in ways not easily perceptible to the senses. To put it in modern language, a person who shows no vital signs might not yet be brain dead, and might still be producing measurable brain activity even without respiration or blood circulation.

So for Democritus the precise line between life and death is not clear. However, once a person is truly and completely dead, all perception has ceased. He did not believe in life after death.

An Epicurean might say that "the soul dies with the body". Democritus might say that "the soul and the body both die, but the precise moment of either death is uncertain."

Would Epicurus disagree with this? If at bodily death the atomic compound of the soul disaggregates into atoms, is this process uniform and instantaneous? This might be the kind of question Democritus is asking.

Post by “Joshua” of March 9, 2025 at 6:53 PM

[Cassius](#) did you mean to post this under Episode 271?

Post by “Cassius” of March 9, 2025 at 7:24 PM

Thanks Joshua but I did mean it for this thread, Yes, Democritus is what brought it to mind, but this particular thought is really more focused on the overall evaluation of pleasure and happiness than it is on the Democritus discussion we had today.