

DEFINITION AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE  
IN CICERO *DE FINIBUS* 2

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CICERO'S INTERESTS in the second book of *De finibus* are not limited to Epicurean ethics. Out of the first-order ethical discussions of the book there emerges a parallel debate about philosophical procedure. At 2.3–19, Cicero treats, in quick succession, two distinct methodological issues: the rejection of definition (2.3–5), and the use of ethical terms drawn from ordinary language (2.6–19, revisited at 2.48–50). For Epicureans, these two issues were not unrelated. In the first two parts of this article I provide a new account of Epicurus' rejection of definition in the light of his attitudes toward ordinary language. This includes an interpretation of the role of preconceptions in Epicurean inquiry, together with a novel understanding of how the relationship of preconceptions to words allows them to be distinguished from other conceptions in a useful way. I will show how the existence, in Epicurean linguistic theory, of transparent connections between terms and underlying preconceptions, and between preconceptions and external reality, warranted a rejection of definition (both real and nominal) as procedurally unnecessary. In the third, fourth, and fifth parts, I consider how these Epicurean theories are (and are not) dealt with in *De finibus* 2. There I will show that, instead of attacking Epicurean doctrine for its epistemological and language-theoretical commitments, Cicero adopts a dialectical approach, seeking to demonstrate that Epicureans regularly fail, in practice, to live up to their own professed procedural standards.

1. EPICURUS' REJECTION OF DEFINITION

Although Epicurus does not explicitly discuss definition in his extant texts, two important *testimonia* besides Cicero state that he rejected it as procedurally unnecessary.<sup>1</sup> First, the anonymous Academic author of a commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus* (*P. Berol.* inv. 9782) states that, for Epicurus, "terms are

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1. It has been argued that the rejection of ἀξιιώματα κενά ("empty axioms") and νομοθεσίαι ("arbitrary principles") at *Ep. Pyth.* 86 includes a rejection of definitions (thus Asmis 1984, 40; Tsouna 2007, 67). I think this is a mistake: there Epicurus justifies his use, in *Ep. Pyth.*, of the "multiple mode" of explanation. In the case of celestial phenomena, multiple explanations must be offered when there is more than one explanation consonant with what we perceive. The rejection of ἀξιιώματα κενά and νομοθεσίαι should thus be understood as a warning against an overly narrow attitude to explanation; we must not reduce all explanations for a given phenomenon to a single explanation just for the sake of purity or parsimony.

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clearer than definitions” (τὰ ὀνόματα . . . σαφέστερα εἶναι τῶν ὄρων).<sup>2</sup> An example is provided (Col. 22.42–47): to say “Hail, mortal rational animal” instead of “Hail, Socrates” would be absurd (γελοῖον).<sup>3</sup> Secondly, Erotian, in the prologue to his Hippocratic lexicon (first century CE), quotes Epicurus as saying that “the clarity of an expression is lost” (ἀπόλλυται . . . τῆς ἐρμηνείας τὸ φανερόν) when a definition is used in place of the expression itself (ὄθ’ ὑπὸ λόγου καθάπερ τινὸς οἰκείου μαγγανεύηται φαρμάκου).<sup>4</sup> According to each of these two *testimonia*, Epicurus rejected definition on the grounds that terms themselves possess a clarity that their definitions lack. Rather than formulating definitions for the terms we use, we should rely on the clarity that each term possesses.

Why would Epicurus think that terms possess their own clarity? For Epicurus (*Epistula ad Herodotum* 37–38), we understand words by looking to the conceptions (ἐννοήματα) that are subordinated to them. While the things subordinated to words can be true or false,<sup>5</sup> grasping a certain group of subordinated conceptions (called “primary” [πρῶτα] at *Epistula ad Herodotum* 38) is understood to be crucial for successful inquiry. These primary conceptions stand in need of no proof (μηθὲν ἀποδείξεως προσδεῖσθαι), and reliance on them enables us to avoid infinite regress and “empty words” (μὴ ἄκριτα πάντα ἡμῖν <ῆ> εἰς ἄπειρον ἀποδεικνύουσιν ἢ κενοὺς φθόγγους ἔχωμεν). They may be called epistemically foundational, in that we do not need to refer to other conceptions in order to grasp them. As Diogenes Laertius makes clear,<sup>6</sup> the primary subordinated conceptions of *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37–38 may be identified with Epicurean preconceptions (προλήψεις)—self-evident (ἐναργεῖς) conceptions capable of functioning as criteria of truth.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear from both *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37–38 and Diogenes Laertius 10.33 that a preconception of a thing will enjoy a transparent psychological connection to the term that refers to that thing. As Diogenes puts it, “as soon as the word ‘man’ is spoken, an impression of man is envisaged in accordance with a preconception.”<sup>8</sup> Accessing preconceptions in this manner will be highly beneficial to the inquirer: preconceptions, as self-evident, foundational

2. Col. 22.39–42. On the date of this commentary (probably first century BCE), see Bastianini and Sedley 1995, 254–56. All translations in this paper are my own.

3. Compare a very similar argument at Sext. Emp. *Pyrr.* 2.211. The commentator’s use of the proper noun “Socrates” instead of the common noun “man” (cf. Sextus’ ἀνθρώπος) confuses the issue somewhat, and may be attributed either to a genuine slip or to a deliberate attempt to make the Epicurean position appear absurd.

4. Usener 258. Literally: “when it is charmed by an account, as though by some suitable drug.” With Asmis (1984, 39 n. 15), I understand the clause beginning ἀπόλλυται γάρ . . . to be reporting the position of Epicurus, albeit in Erotian’s own highly idiosyncratic, medicalizing style.

5. For an example of something false being subordinated to words see *Nat.* 28 frag. 13 Col. 7.4–5 sup. (ψευδῆς ὑποτετάχθαι ταῖς λέξεσιν ἐκίνας δόξαι, “a false belief has been subordinated to these words”) with Barnes 1996, 213. All quotations of *Nat.* 28 in this paper use the text of Sedley (1973).

6. 10.33: παντὶ ὄντι ὀνόματι τὸ πρῶτος ὑποτεταγμένον ἐναργές ἐστι (“therefore the first thing subordinated to each word is self-evident”), accepting Gassendi’s emendation of ὑποτεταγμένον for the transmitted ἐπιτεταγμένον, *pace* Laks (1976, 113), Balaudé (1999, 1263 n. 2), and Dorandi (2013, 754). The reservations of Laks and Balaudé fail to address the fact that ἐπιτάσσω is not elsewhere used in the sense they ascribe to it (see Asmis 1984, 22 n. 8).

7. On Epicurean preconceptions, see esp. Manuwald 1972; Goldschmidt 1978; Barnes 1996; Hammerstaedt 1996; Morel 2008; Fine 2014, 226–56.

8. ἅμα γάρ τῷ ῥηθῆναι ἀνθρώπος εὐθὺς κατὰ πρόληψιν καὶ ὁ τύπος αὐτοῦ νοεῖται. This sentence suggests an obvious way of understanding the meaning of πρῶτον at *Ep. Hdt.* 38: the “primary” conception is the conception that is at the forefront of our minds, i.e., the one that we most readily associate with a particular word (compare

conceptions, provide the inquirer with a standard against which to measure the truth of other conceptions or opinions encountered during inquiry.<sup>9</sup> A preconception (unlike a definition) will not need to be learned, created, or worked up by the inquirer. Rather, it will have been formed naturally in response to repeated perceptual experiences during the inquirer's lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

So, for Epicurus, terms are clearer than definitions in two significant senses: first, terms feature transparent psychological connections to the primary conceptions subordinated to them that enable the inquirer to access each primary conception with ease (this is what Erotian must mean by τῆς ἐρμηνείας τὸ φανερόν); secondly, the primary conception that is subordinated to a term is self-evident (ἐναργής) and so stands in need of no proof or demonstration.<sup>11</sup> This combination of transparent connections—between terms and preconceptions, and between preconceptions and reality—warrants the rejection of definitions, whether they are conceived of as linguistic accounts of the meanings of terms (nominal definitions) or as ontological accounts of the natures of things (real definitions).<sup>12</sup> Thus Diogenes, at 10.31, states that Epicurus considered dialectic to be redundant (παρέλκουσαν) on the grounds that: ἀρκεῖν . . . τοὺς φυσικοὺς χωρεῖν κατὰ τοὺς τῶν πραγμάτων φθόγγους (“it is sufficient for the physicists to proceed in accordance with the terms for things”). Physicists need not employ the tools of dialectic (including definitions), but should rely instead on the clarity possessed by terms themselves.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. EPICURUS AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE

Preconceptions will be more useful to the inquirer if they are easily distinguishable from other conceptions. This is because an inquirer can only ensure that she is using preconceptions (rather than other conceptions) as criteria if

the view of Atherton [2009, 213–14], for whom πρῶτον also has a historical dimension). For other possible interpretations of πρῶτον at *Ep. Hdt.* 38, see Long 1971, 124–25; Sedley 1973, 20–21; Asmis 1984, 31–34.

9. For preconceptions as criteria of truth, see Diog. Laert. 10.31, with Striker 1996, 22–76.

10. Diog. Laert. 10.33: τὴν δὲ πρόληψιν λέγουσιν οἰοῦναι κατάληψιν ἢ δόξαν ὀρθὴν ἢ ἔννοιαν ἢ καθολικὴν νόησιν ἐναποκειμένην, τούτεστι μνήμην, τοῦ πολλάκις ἔξωθεν φανέντος (“by ‘preconception’ they mean something like direct apprehension, or true opinion, or conception, or stored-up universal opinion [i.e., memory], of that which regularly appears from outside”). On the interpretation of this sentence, see esp. Fine 2014, 228–35; the punctuation (comma after μνήμην) is that of Long and Sedley (1987, 2.92–93).

11. On Epicurean ἐναργεία, see Obbink 1992, 199–200; Ierodiakonou 2011, 63–69.

12. For the distinction, see esp. Modrak 2010. Nominal definitions should be synonymous with the terms whose meanings they are intended to capture, so that substituting a term with its nominal definition should result in no change of meaning. According to the *testimonia* of Erotian and the anonymous Academic commentator, Epicurus rejects the use of such definitions not because substitution will result in a change of meaning, but because substitution will result in a loss of clarity: the transparent connection which, according to Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus believed to exist between terms and their primary subordinated conceptions means that nominal definitions are superfluous when it comes to capturing a term's meaning. Moreover, the role of preconceptions in Epicurus' theory means that ontological concerns cannot be excluded from the picture: just as the transparent accessibility of primary conceptions renders nominal definition unnecessary, so too does the status of those primary conceptions as self-evident accounts of features of the world remove the need for real definitions.

13. On my reading of the Epicurean position, definitions are rejected chiefly on the grounds that the possession of preconceptions renders them redundant. For an alternative account—that the Epicurean rejection of definition (together with the other tools of dialectic) is rooted in Epicurus' deep-seated ontological commitments—see Sedley forthcoming.

those preconceptions are readily identifiable as such. We may call this the “luminosity requirement”: my preconceptions will be more useful to me if they are luminous in the sense that, whenever I grasp a preconception, I will always know or be in a position to know that I am grasping a preconception.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, however, there is no evidence to suggest that, for Epicurus, someone in possession of a preconception will automatically be able to recognize that preconception as a preconception.<sup>15</sup> This raises the problem of how, at any one time, one can be expected to know whether the conception upon which one is relying is a preconception or not. How did Epicurus respond to this problem? An answer is provided by the advice given at *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37–38 always to look to the primary conception underlying each word. As we have seen, the connection between a given word and the primary conception that is subordinated to it will be transparent to the inquirer (provided, we must assume, that the inquirer has sufficient competence in the language). The inquirer is thus provided with a (mostly) reliable method for identifying the relevant preconception for any line of inquiry. This, I believe, is one reason why the term πρόληψις is not employed at *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37–38:<sup>16</sup> since an inquirer may not be able automatically to distinguish preconceptions from other conceptions, advising her simply to “look to the preconception” would not be useful advice. While she may not automatically know which of her conceptions are preconceptions, she will, provided that she is linguistically competent, be able to identify the primary subordinated conception to each word: the primary subordinated conception will be the first conception to come to mind when a word is uttered. So, provided that the first subordinated conception to a word is always the preconception of the thing to which that word refers, always looking to the first subordinated conception will enable her to distinguish her preconceptions from her other conceptions. In this way the luminosity requirement will be fulfilled in normal cases.

But this raises a further question: what ensures that the primary conception subordinated to a word will be a preconception (and, for that matter, the *right* preconception)? The key to answering this question is provided by the regular Epicurean insistence that philosophical inquiry is carried out using ordinary language. For appeals to the importance of ordinary language in the texts of Epicurus we may look to: (a) *Epistula ad Herodotum* 67, where an appeal is made to “the common usage” (τὴν πλείστην ὁμιλίαν) of the term “incorporeal”; (b) *Epistula ad Herodotum* 70, where a similar appeal is made to “the common meaning” (τὴν πλείστην φοράν) of the term “accidents”; and (c) *On Nature* 28 fragment 13 Col. 5. 8–12 sup., where the claim is made that Epicureans themselves neither stray from established usage nor change names<sup>17</sup> in

14. For this notion of luminosity, see Williamson 2000, 93–113.

15. Compare the account of Fine (2014, 233–35). In some cases there may in fact be reason to infer that people regularly fail to recognize their preconceptions as such: if, for example, they wrongly attribute qualities to the gods that are inconsistent with the content of the preconception of god (see below).

16. Compare the explanations of Sedley (1973, 14), and Long and Sedley (1987, 1.89, 2.92).

17. On the meaning of μετατιθέντων ὀνόματα (“changing the names of things,” not “changing the referents of names”), see Sedley 1973, 58.

respect of perceptible objects (οὐκ ἔξω τῶν ἰθισμένων λέξεων ἡμῶν χρωμένων οὐδὲ μετατιθέντων ὀνόματα ἐπὶ τῶν φανε[ρ]ῶν).<sup>18</sup> (B) is particularly illuminating: there Epicurus states that using the term for accidents (συμπτώματα) in its “common meaning” will enable the clear (φανερὰ) expression of their nature (here compare Erotian’s reference to τῆς ἐρμηνείας τὸ φανερόν). This suggests that, for Epicurus, to ensure the clarity of terms (and thus to ensure that the luminosity requirement for preconceptions will be fulfilled), one must use them in their ordinary senses.<sup>19</sup> The sources are not explicit on the nature of the linguistic theory that must have underwritten this view, but we may assume that it relied on Epicurean naturalism about language origins. If Epicurus believed both that the relation between word and primary conception was originally determined by nature (*Epistula ad Herodotum* 75), and that this original natural connection between word and primary conception tends to be preserved in ordinary language, this would be sufficient to justify the importance he places on the use of ordinary language in inquiry.<sup>20</sup>

The benefit of always using terms in their ordinary senses should now be clear: it offers language-competent inquirers easy and transparent access to the preconception relevant to each area of inquiry, and furthermore gives them a reliable way to ensure they are relying on preconceptions rather than on any other conceptions they may have (thus fulfilling the luminosity requirement for preconceptions). An important corollary of this theory, of course, is that terms are only clearer than definitions when they are used in their ordinary senses. This explains Epicurus’ concern not to change names in respect of perceptible objects (*On Nature* 28 frag. 13 Col. 5.8–12 sup.): changing the name of an object will result in the loss of the transparent connection that exists between term and underlying preconception.

Clearly, however, there are ways in which this reliance on the ordinary meanings of terms may constitute a real vulnerability for the whole theory. If the use of ordinary language is the primary means of distinguishing preconceptions from other conceptions, what happens when there is uncertainty or disagreement over which linguistic usages count as ordinary, or when certain misguided cultural or philosophical developments work to obscure the ordinary meanings of terms?<sup>21</sup> In such cases, Epicurus appears to have relied on

18. For linguistic convention in *Nat.* 28, see also frag. 12 Col. 3.11–12; frag. 13 Col. 9.4–3 inf., with Leone 1987, 53 n. 10.

19. For another Epicurean appeal to the authority of ordinary language for fixing the correct meaning of a term, see Philodemus *De pietate* 213–14 Obbink, with Obbink 1996, 303–4. Colotes (πρὸς τὸν Πλάτωνος Λύσιον p. 165 Crönert) appears to make a direct connection between ordinary language and ἐνάργεια: ἡ γε κοινὴ πάντων ἡμῶν ὁμιλία ἦν τῆρηρεῖν τοὺς φ[θ]όγγου[ς] κα[τὰ] τὸ ἐν[α]ργές (“the common linguistic practice of all of us was to observe the words according to that which is self-evident”). Philodemus *Oeconomicus* Col. 20–21 Jensen may constitute an exception to the rule, showing how in some cases (presumably cases involving ambiguity brought about by competing ordinary meanings of a single term) ordinary meanings can be manipulated by sophists into obscuring the underlying preconception (see Tsouna 2013, 98).

20. This interpretation is supported by a new fragment of Diogenes of Oinoanda (NF 192, first published in Hammerstaedt and Smith 2011) where we find, in the context of a discussion of the term “pleasure,” an appeal to the ordinary meaning of that term among all Greeks “from the beginning” (Col. 4.13–14: ἀνοθεν ὠμειλη[μέ]-νον πᾶσιν Ἑλλήσιν; see Taylor 2014).

21. See n. 15 above for the example of god.

brief verbal accounts (“outline accounts”) of the contents of preconceptions.<sup>22</sup> These were heuristic in function: given that all inquirers would be in (tacit) possession of preconceptions, the content of a preconception needed only to be pointed out, not taught from scratch.<sup>23</sup> In this way, outline accounts functioned as an alternative (and, it seems, rarely used) method of enabling inquirers to distinguish their preconceptions.

A (rare) example of such a verbal account in the texts of Epicurus himself is found at *Epistula ad Menoeceum* 123. There Menoeceus is warned not to assign any alien or inappropriate qualities to god, thinking of god as “immortal and blessed, as the common idea of god was outlined” (ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη).<sup>24</sup> To assign such inappropriate qualities would be to rely not on the preconception of god (which, as we are told in the same passage, is ἐναργής) but rather on false supposition: οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσὶν ἀλλ’ ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις (“for the assertions of the multitude concerning the gods are not preconceptions but false suppositions”).<sup>25</sup> The purpose of “outlining” the preconception of god here is to ensure that Menoeceus bears the true conception of god in mind when reading the contents of the letter, so as to avoid experiencing fear. The fact that this particular preconception requires outlining is no surprise: incorrect beliefs about the gods are believed by Epicureans to be both particularly prevalent and particularly harmful. Rather than relying solely on the clarity of the term itself, in this case Epicurus employs the term “god” plus a brief verbal account of the content of the preconception of god.<sup>26</sup>

Epicurus’ occasional reliance on outline accounts makes it clear that the use of ordinary language alone will not always ensure that the luminosity requirement for preconceptions is fulfilled. Sometimes, it seems, this otherwise

22. See Asmis 1984, 42–43; Long and Sedley 1987, 1.101; Besnier 1994; Tsouna 2007, 66–68; Asmis 2009, 86–87; Fine 2014, 237–40.

23. While these are often referred to in the scholarly literature as “outlines” or “outline accounts” (a practice I shall follow), there is very little evidence for Epicurus’ own terminology (see here also Sedley forthcoming). While ὑπογραφή has the status of a technical term in Stoic philosophy, referring to an initial informative sketch falling short of the standard of a full definition (Gourinat 2000, 51–54; Crivelli 2010, 394–96), Epicurus never uses the noun, and uses the verb ὑπογράφω in the sense of *outline* only once, at *Ep. Men.* 123. While Epicurus does refer to τύποι in methodological contexts, he uses this word to refer to quite detailed accounts of certain areas of doctrine to be learned and then held in mind by the reader (see, e.g., *Ep. Hdt.* 35, on physics; *Ep. Hdt.* 68, on the soul), rather than to brief outline accounts that help to establish the object of inquiry (a sense in which Aristotle sometimes uses that term: see *De an.* 413a9–10, with Charles 2000, 168 n. 54 and Johansen 2012, 10–12, 34–40; also *Top.* 101a18–24 and *Hist. an.* 491a7–14, both with Bolton 1978, 259). I suspect that the descriptive account of worlds offered by Epicurus at *Ep. Pyth.* 88, which contains far more information than presumably would or could be contained in the preconception of world (see also Sedley forthcoming on this point), also falls into the category of τύποι (*pace* Long and Sedley [1987, 1.101], for whom this is an example of an “outline account”).

24. The aorist tense of the verb is most easily explained in the light of the earlier communication between Epicurus and Menoeceus to which reference has just been made in the previous sentence of the letter; we may assume that this communication included the outlining of the preconception of god as being immortal and blessed (for alternative interpretations of the tense, and consideration of possible emendations, see Manuwald 1972, 60).

25. For the Epicurean term ὑπόληψις, see Diog. Laert. 10.34.

26. For further evidence for the nature and function of Epicurean outline accounts, see the definition of definition at Sext. *Emp. Pyr.* 2.212, which was probably influenced by Epicurean technical language, and Cic. *Fin.* 1.30 (see n. 31 below), where Torquatus appears to distinguish between the use of definitions and the use of mere “reminders” (*admonitiones*), both with Besnier 1994.



reliable test for identifying preconceptions can fail. This is perhaps to be expected, given what we know about Epicurean language theory: the natural stage of the development of language (which, it was suggested above, underwrote Epicurus' theory about the value of ordinary language to inquiry) was followed (*Ep. Hdt.* 76) by a conventional stage of development. The influence of convention on the development of language means that the existence of a transparent connection between ordinary language and preconceptions is not guaranteed in all cases. The case of "god" may be instructive in this regard: as Lucretius shows (5.1169–1203), while early humans did have access to an accurate conception of the nature of the gods (via their waking and dreaming perceptual experiences), the addition of false opinion to this accurate conception resulted in the widely-held false beliefs about gods that still do harm today (5.1196–97; compare *Ep. Men.* 123, discussed above). The existence of widely-held false beliefs about the nature of gods means that inquirers can no longer rely on the ordinary meaning of the term "god": prevalent cultural and philosophical confusion has muddied the issue, resulting in the failure of luminosity in this case. In such cases, wherein ordinary language does not allow secure and transparent access to the relevant preconception, the problem can be fixed by the use of a verbal account (an "outline") enabling the inquirer to rule out all other conceptions.

Epicureans do not need to rely on definition in order to form new opinions or conceptions about the world; all they need to do is to ensure that any new opinions or conceptions they form are in agreement with their preconceptions—preconceptions which are already known to inquirers (even if only tacitly) at the start of inquiry. Their reliance on preconceptions led the Epicureans to express a preference for the use of ordinary language when doing philosophy, ensuring (in most cases) easy access to the preconceptions relevant to each inquiry.

### 3. CICERO ON EPICURUS' REJECTION OF DEFINITION (*FIN.* 2.3–5)

Cicero addresses Epicurus' rejection of definition at *De finibus* 2.3–5. He begins by citing a passage of Plato's *Phaedrus* with which, he says, Epicurus is in express agreement (*Fin.* 2.3–4):

omnis autem in quaerendo quae via quadam et ratione habetur oratio praescribere primum debet, ut quibusdam in formulis EA RES AGATUR, ut inter quos disseritur conveniat quid sit id de quo disseratur. hoc positum in Phaedro a Platone probavit Epicurus sensitque in omni disputatione id fieri oportere.

In inquiry, every discussion that proceeds in an orderly and reasonable fashion must first construct a *praescriptio* (as is introduced in certain legal formulae with the phrase "the following matter will be before the court,") so that there may be agreement among inquirers as to what it is that is being discussed. Plato stated this in *Phaedrus*; Epicurus approved of it and believed that it ought to be standard procedure in debate.

In the passage to which Cicero alludes here (*Phdr.* 237b–d), Socrates states that the first thing required of someone undertaking an investigation is to know what the investigation is about; those who begin an investigation

without knowledge of the nature of the topic under discussion will end up in disagreement both with themselves and with their interlocutors. This much we may imagine Epicurus agreeing with in all cases: grasping the appropriate preconceptions (which are both self-evident and available to all inquirers) is a crucial prerequisite for successful inquiry. Socrates goes on to say that he and Phaedrus should agree on a definition (*ὄρος*) of love—what it is and what it can do—to which they can refer back in the course of inquiry. Cicero compares this process to the construction of a *praescriptio*—a procedural element of some trials in Roman civil law.<sup>27</sup> This was an agreed-upon verbal account, usually beginning with the phrase *ea res agatur*, which served to restrict the scope of the action being brought before the court (Gai. *Inst.* 4.130–37).<sup>28</sup> Its function was to delimit the issue to be judged, without providing a full and precise determination of the action (the function of the *formula*).<sup>29</sup>

We may thus distinguish two distinct procedural issues in this passage: first, the basic idea that inquirers should be in agreement as to the nature of the object of inquiry at the outset (*ut inter quos disseritur conveniat quid sit id de quo disseratur*); second, the further claim that such agreement should be established via the use of a verbal account akin to a *praescriptio*. This distinction is important for understanding Epicurean procedural doctrine: as we have seen, while for Epicurus it is always true that inquirers should look to their commonly-held preconceptions at the outset of inquiry, it is not always necessary for them to rely on verbal accounts in order to enable preconceptions to be identified (usually it will be enough to focus on the ordinary meanings of terms). Cicero, in his blanket attribution of “approval” to Epicurus here, allows for no such distinction. We are told not only that Epicurus approved of the Platonic position just described (including the use of verbal accounts akin to *praescriptiones*—a clear reference to Epicurean outlines), but also that he thought this to be appropriate procedure *in omni disputatione*. This is a misrepresentation: verbal accounts, on the Epicurean model, were not required in all cases. Cicero’s failure to distinguish between Epicurus’ belief in the importance of grasping the nature of the object of inquiry at the outset and his use of outline accounts, in special cases, to enable this to be achieved leads to the overstatement in this passage of the importance of outline accounts to Epicurean procedure.<sup>30</sup> The result is that Epicurean procedure, on Cicero’s account, is brought into closer alignment with Cicero’s own Academic preferences. There follows Cicero’s primary criticism of Epicurus’ attitude to definition (*Fin.* 2.4–5):

27. On *praescriptiones*, see Hackl 1976, 33–64; Kaser and Hackl 1996, 320–22; Pellecchi 2003.

28. See Gordon and Robinson 1988, 542.

29. On *formulae*, see Talamanca 1987, 24–79; Kaser and Hackl 1996, 308–22.

30. Compare the opening of Torquatus’ speech at 1.29, where the use of outline accounts to establish the object of inquiry is presented as though it were standard Epicurean procedure: *primum igitur, inquit, sic agam ut ipsi auctori huius disciplinae placet: constituam quid et quale sit id de quo quaerimus, non quo ignorare vos arbitrer, sed ut ratione et via procedat oratio* (“I will start, said [Torquatus], in the way that the founder of this school thought proper: I will establish the nature and character of what we are investigating; not because I think you do not know, but so that my speech may proceed in an orderly and reasonable fashion”). For a similar overstatement of the importance of outlines to Epicurean procedure, see Usener 92 (= Scholia to Dionysius Thrax, 116.7–12 Hilgard).



sed quod proximum fuit non vidit. negat enim definiri rem placere, sine quo fieri interdum non potest ut inter eos qui ambigunt conveniat quid sit id de quo agatur, velut in hoc ipso de quo nunc disputamus. quaerimus enim finem bonorum: possumusne hoc scire quale sit, nisi contulerimus inter nos, cum finem bonorum dixerimus, quid finis, quid etiam sit ipsum bonum? atqui haec patefactio quasi rerum operatarum, cum quid quidque sit aperitur, definitio est; qua tu etiam imprudens utebare non numquam. nam hunc ipsum sive finem sive extremum sive ultimum definiebas id esse quo omnia quae recte fierent referrentur neque id ipsum usquam referretur.

But [Epicurus] did not see what followed from this. For he says that he does not care to define his subject matter. But without this it is sometimes impossible for inquirers to agree on what it is that is in question, just as is the case with the very thing we are debating now. For we are inquiring after the ultimate good: how can we know what kind of thing this is, unless we have already agreed among ourselves, when we have said “the ultimate good,” what we mean by “ultimate” and what we mean by “good”? And yet this revealing, so to speak, of hidden things—when it is made clear what each thing is—is definition, something that even you, on occasion, employ inadvertently. For you defined this final, extreme or ultimate good as “that to which all correct actions are referred, and which is never itself referred to anything.”

Epicurus holds to the principle that it is always necessary for inquirers to agree at the outset on the nature of what it is that is under discussion (2.3–4). In some cases (*interdum*), however, inquirers cannot reach such agreement without using definition (2.4–5). A result of Epicurus’ rejection of definition, therefore, will be that in some cases (and an inquiry into the ultimate good is one such case), Epicurean procedure will be unable to ensure agreement among inquirers at the outset. As such, Epicurean philosophical procedure is inconsistent, insofar as holding to one of its stated principles—the rejection of definition—will ensure that another of its stated principles—the necessity of initial agreement among inquirers—is not observed in all cases.

Of course, Cicero’s claim that in some cases initial agreement is impossible without definition is unlikely to command the assent of any Epicurean worth her salt. As was established in the first two parts of this paper, the Epicurean doctrine of the transparency of the term-preconception relationship, together with the universal and self-evident statuses of preconceptions themselves, was understood to render definition unnecessary to philosophical inquiry in all cases. Cicero’s brief account of Epicurus’ beliefs about the importance of initial agreement, however (2.3–4), is not only false (in that it wrongly suggests that Epicurus advocated the use of verbal accounts *in omni disputatione*), but also incomplete, making as it does no mention of the crucial role played by preconceptions in Epicurean procedure. Epicurean outlines, as we have seen, are not intended to establish agreement in and of themselves, but rather to point inquirers toward the appropriate preconception, which, being both self-evident and universally-held, is a powerful tool for establishing initial agreement. By leaving preconceptions out of his account at 2.3–4, Cicero implies that Epicureans intended outlines alone to do the work of establishing initial agreement among inquirers. This allows him to go on to object (at 2.4–5) that, in some cases, a brief, non-definitional verbal account such as an Epicurean outline will

not suffice to establish the required initial agreement.<sup>31</sup> Cicero ends his argument with the *ad hominem* claim that some Epicureans, given the necessity of establishing initial agreement, are unable to avoid using definitions in some cases. Torquatus' "definition" of the good at 1.29 provides a case in point: in practice, it is simply not possible both always to seek initial agreement and to shun definitions in all cases.<sup>32</sup>

At 2.3–5, then, Cicero takes a dialectical approach to Epicurean procedure, seeking to demonstrate how Epicurus' rejection of definition contradicts, in some cases, his principle of always establishing initial agreement among inquirers. The dialogic form of *De finibus* enables him to use Torquatus' own words from Book 1 to show how this supposed inconsistency plays out in practice. However, in misrepresenting Epicurean doctrine at 2.3–4 in such a way as to suggest that outline accounts were (a) employed in all cases and (b) intended (rather like definitions) to do the work of establishing agreement on their own, Cicero makes his own job much easier than it should be. He makes no mention of the power of Epicurean preconceptions, or of the ability of terms used in their ordinary senses to render preconceptions luminous to inquirers. As we shall see in Parts 4 and 5, however, Cicero was by no means unaware of these doctrines.

#### 4. CICERO ON EPICUREAN USAGE 1: "PLEASURE" (*FIN.* 2.6–19)

Cicero's criticism of Epicurus on definition at *De finibus* 2.3–5 leads directly to a discussion of Epicurus' understanding of the term "pleasure."<sup>33</sup> Cicero begins by asking Torquatus (as an occasional, inadvertent employer of definitions) to define pleasure; Torquatus objects that everyone already knows what pleasure is. Cicero responds in turn that Epicurus himself had no such knowledge (*Fin.* 2.6):

nunc autem dico ipsum Epicurum nescire et in eo nutare, eumque qui crebro dicat diligenter oportere exprimi quae vis subiecta sit vocibus non intellegere interdum quid sonet haec vox voluptatis, id est quae res huic voci subiciatur.<sup>34</sup>

31. Note that Cicero's definition of definition at 2.5 (*patefactio quasi rerum operatarum, cum quid quidque sit aperitur*) looks back to 1.30, where Torquatus, in a clear reference to Epicurean outline accounts (Besnier 1994, 124), mentions an Epicurean distinction between *rationes* (taken to include definitions) and *admonitiones* (verbal reminders of the contents of preconceptions): *interesse enim inter argumentum conclusionemque rationis et inter mediocrem animadversionem atque admonitionem: altera occulta quaedam et quasi involuta aperiri, altera prompta et aperta iudicari* ("[Epicurus says that] there is a difference between the reasoned proof of logic and mere attention and reminding. The former, he says, involves uncovering certain matters that are hidden and, so to speak, wrapped up in themselves; the latter involves judging things that are clear and evident"). The similarity between Cicero's definition of definition at 2.5 and Torquatus' language here reinforces the notion that Epicurean outline accounts are not sufficient to do the work of definition: what is required is the uncovering of what was previously hidden (*patefactio quasi rerum operatarum*)—something Torquatus at 1.30 has excluded from the remit of outline accounts.

32. This *ad hominem* claim is part of a broader strategy of characterization in *Fin.* 2 wherein Cicero seeks to present Torquatus as both too good and too intelligent to be fully committed to the Epicurean doctrines he espouses.

33. See Duszyńska 1948–49, 212.

34. Cf. 2.15.

But now I am saying that Epicurus himself does not know, and wavers in this matter, and that he, who frequently says that the meaning which is subordinated to words ought to be expressed carefully, sometimes does not understand what this word “pleasure” means (that is, he sometimes does not understand what thing is subordinated to this word).

Cicero’s choice of words here is directly influenced by the Epicurean terminology evidenced at *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37–38: *subiecta* and *subiciatur* are morphological calques of the Epicurean technical term ὑποτάσσω, while *vocibus/vox/voci* all render Epicurus’ term φθόγγος.<sup>35</sup> Cicero’s adoption of Epicurean technical language here provides an early indication of his dialectical approach to the Epicurean account of pleasure: as we shall see, in the following paragraphs Cicero will seek to demonstrate that Epicurus’ account of pleasure is not only false, but actually stands in contradiction to Epicurus’ own professed methodological principles.

According to 2.6, Epicurus is not always wrong when it comes to the meaning of the term “pleasure”—he errs only some of the time.<sup>36</sup> This is made clear not only by the temporal adverb *interdum* qualifying *non intellegere*, but also by Cicero’s use of the verb *nutare*, which suggests vacillation between differing accounts, resulting in overall inconsistency.<sup>37</sup> The nature of Epicurus’ alleged inconsistency with respect to “pleasure” is spelled out in the following paragraphs: sometimes Epicurus uses the term “pleasure” in a way that agrees with how all others use that term,<sup>38</sup> referring to that which, when experienced, moves the senses and “floods them with a delightful feeling” (2.6). This is kinetic pleasure. A specific example of such Epicurean usage is given at 2.7 in the form of an oft-cited passage from Epicurus’ Περὶ τέλους (Usener 67). While in this case (*hoc loco*), Epicurus uses “pleasure” in the same sense as all others do, elsewhere he uses the same term in a very different way, to refer to the absence of pain that Hieronymus of Rhodes judged to be the greatest good (2.8). This static use of “pleasure” to refer to the absence of pain is the misunderstanding to which reference is made at 2.6. The result is that Epicurus’ overall use-pattern of the term “pleasure” combines instances of both correct and incorrect usage. By incorporating the absence of pain into his conception of pleasure Epicurus ends up “using the same term for two very different things” (2.9; cf. 2.30), only one of which is the proper referent of “pleasure.”<sup>39</sup>

At 2.12–15, Cicero goes on to deal with the potential objection that he simply does not understand what Epicurus means by “pleasure”—an objection which is often made and which he finds particularly irritating (2.12). Cicero’s

35. See Madvig 1876, 143; Reid 1925, 108–9; Selem 1962, 88.

36. At 2.8 and 2.13 Cicero establishes that the Latin term *voluptas* is a synonym (*idem valeat*) of the Greek term ἡδονή. By insisting that these two words have identical meanings, Cicero ensures that his objections to Epicurus’ use of the word “pleasure” cannot be attributed to a failure in translation.

37. Compare Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.120, on Democritus’ inconsistent theology: *mihi quidem etiam Democritus . . . nutare videtur in natura deorum* (“Indeed even Democritus seems to me to waver on the nature of the gods”).

38. See also 2.20: *cum enim eam ipsam voluptatem quam eodem nomine omnes appellamus [Epicurus] laudat locis plurimis* (“For since Epicurus very often praises precisely this kind of pleasure which we all call by the name ‘pleasure’”).

39. Compare Varro *De philosophia* frag. 2 Langenberg (August. *De civ. D.* 19.1 = Usener 398): *utramque quam tamen uno nomine voluptatis Epicurus appellat* (“[pleasure and tranquillity], each of which Epicurus nonetheless calls by the same name of ‘pleasure’”).

response to this objection is to establish that he does, in fact, have a good idea of the correct meanings of both *voluptas* and ἡδονή (described as synonyms at 2.13), and that it is Epicurus whose understanding is idiosyncratic. The standard Cicero uses for determining the correct meaning of the term “pleasure” is instructive: the agreement of all language-users. This agreement is outlined at 2.13–14 where, once again, we note Cicero’s appropriation (*subiciunt*) of Epicurus’ procedural term ὑποτάσσω:

huic verbo omnes qui ubique sunt qui Latine sciunt duas res subiciunt, laetitiam in animo, commotionem suavam iucunditatis in corpore. nam et ille apud Trabeam “voluptatem animi nimiam” laetitiam dicit, eandem quam ille Caecilianus qui “omnibus laetitiiis laetum” esse se narrat. sed hoc interest, quod “voluptas” dicitur etiam in animo (vitiosa res, ut Stoici putant, qui eam sic definiunt: sublationem animi sine ratione, opinantis se magno bono frui), non dicitur “laetitia” nec “gaudium” in corpore. in eo autem voluptas omnium Latine loquentium more ponitur, cum percipitur ea quae sensum aliquem moveat iucunditas.

All people on earth who know Latin subordinate two things to this term [*sc.* “pleasure”]: happiness in the mind, and a sweet movement of delight in the body. For that character in Trabea calls happiness “an excessive pleasure of the mind”—the same happiness of which that character of Caecilius speaks when he describes himself as “happy with every happiness.” But there is this difference: the term “pleasure” can be used of both bodily and mental feeling (the Stoics consider pleasure of the mind to be a vice, and define it thus: “the uplifting of a mind that irrationally thinks itself to be enjoying a great good”); “happiness” and “joy” are not used of bodily feeling; every speaker of Latin, however, considers pleasure to consist in a bodily feeling,<sup>40</sup> occurring when that delight which stimulates one of the senses is perceived.

After establishing the synonymy of *voluptas* and ἡδονή, Cicero (using Epicurean terminology) appeals to the universal agreement of Latin speakers in order to establish that he does indeed understand the true meaning of “pleasure.” Part of this understanding, confirmed by reference to the natural language encountered in comic texts,<sup>41</sup> involves knowing the difference between “pleasure” and related terms such as “joy” and “happiness,” as well as knowing the proper scope (bodily or mental) of possible applications of the term. This universally-held understanding of pleasure, says Cicero, does not include freedom from pain. The resulting distinction between the universal view and the Epicurean view picks up a point already made at 2.6: “either Epicurus does not know what pleasure is, or all mortals everywhere do not know what pleasure is” (*aut Epicurus quid sit voluptas aut omnes mortales qui ubique sunt nesciunt*). Once again, the claim here is not that Epicurus is fully ignorant of the nature of pleasure, but rather that he uses the term “pleasure” both to refer to what is pleasure and to refer to what is not pleasure (i.e., freedom from pain).

A potential objection to the claim that Epicurus’ idiosyncratic usage shows that he does not know what pleasure is would be that he deliberately uses the term “pleasure” differently from how it is normally used. Cicero admits at 2.15 that there are two ways in which such a situation could come about: Epicurus

40. For this interpretation of *in eo*, see Madvig 1876, 159; Selem 1962, 97–98.

41. Two (not three: see Brown 1997) further comic usages are quoted later in 2.14, again in the context of determining the correct scope of the term “pleasure.”

may either have a particularly obscure style (like Heraclitus), or may be dealing with particularly obscure subject matter (like Plato in the *Timaeus*). He concludes, however, that neither of these applies in the case of Epicurus (*Fin.* 2.15):

Epicurus autem, ut opinor, nec non vult, si possit, plane et aperte loqui, nec de re obscura, ut physici, aut artificiosa, ut mathematici, sed de inlustri et facili et iam in vulgus pervagata loquitur. quamquam non negatis nos intellegere quid sit voluptas, sed quid ille dicat; e quo efficitur non ut nos non intellegamus quae vis sit istius verbi, sed ut ille suo more loquatur, nostrum neglegat.

But Epicurus, in my opinion, is not unwilling, where he can, to speak plainly and clearly; nor is his subject matter obscure (as is that of the natural philosophers), or technical (as is that of the mathematicians); rather, his subject matter is clear, straightforward, and, by now, well known to the public. Yet you say that we are ignorant not about what pleasure is, but about what Epicurus says. From which it follows, not that we do not understand the meaning of the word “pleasure,” but that Epicurus speaks in his own private style, and ignores our manner of speaking.

Epicurus’ style is not obscure, but clear,<sup>42</sup> and his subject matter is too familiar to be called obscure.<sup>43</sup> He has no reason, therefore, not to use words in their commonly-accepted senses. (What is more, we may add, Epicurus is known to have been committed to using words in their ordinary senses.) In the following paragraph, Cicero concludes his attack on Epicurus’ use of the term by drawing an explicit connection between the nature of pleasure—as evidenced by the senses—and the meaning of the term “pleasure” (*Fin.* 2.16):

cum efficere non possit ut cuiquam qui ipse sibi notus sit, hoc est qui suam naturam sensumque perspexerit, vacuitas doloris et voluptas idem esse videatur. hoc est vim adferre, Torquate, sensibus, extorquere ex animis cognitiones verborum quibus inbuti sumus.

For [Epicurus] cannot bring it about that someone with self-knowledge—that is, someone who has a clear view of his own nature and feeling—should think pleasure and freedom from pain to be one and the same thing. This, Torquatus, is to use violence against the senses, and to wrench from our minds the deep-rooted knowledge of the meanings of words.

Cicero’s criticism of Epicurus here is made within a framework that is fully compatible with Epicurean procedural doctrine: our senses inform us of the nature of pleasure (compare Torquatus’ argument at 1.30), and the resulting conception of pleasure enjoys a close psychological connection to the word “pleasure” (*cognitiones verborum quibus inbuti sumus*). Epicurus’ misuse of the term, says Cicero, not only fails to accord with the correct conception of

42. For Cicero on the clarity of Epicurus’ style (cf. Diog. Laert. 10.13), see also *Fin.* 1.15: *oratio me istius philosophi non offendit; nam et complectitur verbis quod vult et dicit plane quod intellegam* (“the speech of that philosopher does not offend me; for he explains in words what he wants to explain, and speaks clearly, that I may understand”). Cicero’s later criticism of various elements of Epicurus’ usage adds a retrospective point of irony to the clause *quod vult* (compare the view of Selem [1962, 99–100], for whom 1.15 and 2.15 are simply contradictory).

43. For Cicero’s (always pejorative) claims in *Fin.* about the familiarity of Epicurus’ subject matter, see also 1.27; 2.12, 49, 75; 3.40.

pleasure, but also disturbs the close connection that exists between term and underlying conception.

I suggest that the similarity between Epicurean methodology and Cicero's own approach here is part of the same dialectical, *ad hominem* technique evidenced elsewhere in the passage 2.6–19. We have already noted the use of Epicurean procedural terminology at 2.6 and 2.13, in both cases demonstrating how Epicurus fails to understand what is subordinated to the term “pleasure.” We have also noted Cicero's regular appeal to universal agreement in determining the correct meaning of the term (see 2.6, 8, 13, 14), as well as his insistence that the Epicurean tendency to use “pleasure” to refer to the absence of pain is not in accordance with customary usage (*consuetudo*). Like Epicurus, then (compare *Ep. Hdt.* 37–38; *Ep. Men.* 123–24), Cicero appeals to a common conception in order to determine the nature of the object of inquiry (in this case, pleasure); like Epicurus, Cicero also appeals to the ordinary meaning<sup>44</sup> of the relevant term (“pleasure”) in order to determine the contents of the common conception. The purpose of Cicero's appeals to these entities, however, is to show that Epicurus has misunderstood both the nature of pleasure (by including freedom from pain in his conception of it) and the meaning of the word “pleasure” (by using it to refer to freedom from pain as well as to pleasure).<sup>45</sup> Cicero has already foregrounded Epicurean philosophical procedure by employing its terms at 2.6; he then goes on to demonstrate how Epicurus' account of pleasure fails to live up to Epicurean procedural standards, including as it does conceptions of the nature of pleasure, and of the meaning of “pleasure,” that are at odds with the content of the common conception. Cicero's repeated insistence that Epicurus' use of the term “pleasure” does not accord with the universally accepted meaning of that term should thus be understood in the light of Epicurus' own doctrine of the importance of ordinary language to philosophical procedure.

So, Cicero's criticism of Epicurus at 2.6–19 is not limited to the claim that he sometimes uses the term “pleasure” incorrectly. By dialectically adopting the terms and approaches of Epicurean philosophical procedure, Cicero also seeks to show that when Epicurus uses the term “pleasure” to refer to absence of pain he fails to live up to his own professed procedural standards. If Epicurus were to stick to those procedural standards, then by “pleasure” he would only ever mean what everyone knows pleasure to mean (and would agree with Aristippus); when, however, he uses “pleasure” to mean something other than the ordinary meaning of that term (such as absence of pain), he does so contrary to his own stated principles of philosophical inquiry. This criticism is well-aimed: it is hard to see how Epicurus could reasonably claim that using ordinary

44. I.e., the meaning familiar to all users of the term; cf. 2.14, 18.

45. For the claim that Epicurus' misunderstanding of pleasure is not merely verbal, see 2.20: *duae sunt enim res quoque, ne tu verba solum putes. unum est sine dolore esse, alterum cum voluptate. vos ex his tam dissimilibus rebus non modo nomen unum (nam id facilius paterer), sed etiam rem unam ex duabus facere conamini, quod fieri nullo modo potest* (“For in case you think there are only two distinct terms, know that there also exist two distinct states; the state of lacking pain, and the state of enjoying pleasure. Not only do you Epicureans try to use a single term to refer to these two quite different states [which would be more permissible], but you also try to make a single state out of the two, which is by no means possible”).



language is an important part of philosophical procedure while simultaneously using the central term “pleasure” in a way that is at odds with its ordinary usage.<sup>46</sup>

At 2.30, Cicero spells out some of the ways in which Epicurus could have avoided erring with respect to the meaning of “pleasure”:

hic si definire, si dividere didicisset, si loquendi vim, si denique consuetudinem verborum teneret, numquam in tantas salebras incidisset. nunc vides quid faciat. quam nemo umquam “voluptatem” appellavit, appellat; quae duo sunt, unum facit.

If Epicurus had learned to define and to divide, if he grasped the meaning of speech or even the ordinary uses of terms, he never would have fallen into such difficulty. For you see now what he does: that which nobody has ever called “pleasure,” he calls “pleasure”; those things which are two, he makes one.

Definitions are here listed as only one possible way in which Epicurus could have avoided error. The final alternative listed here is the grasping of ordinary language—*si denique consuetudinem verborum teneret*—which, as outlined above, formed a crucial part of Epicurus’ own philosophical procedure. It would have been enough, says Cicero, for Epicurus simply to follow his own principles—something that, in adopting a perverse and idiosyncratic understanding of the term “pleasure,” he failed to achieve.

#### 5. CICERO ON EPICUREAN USAGE 2: “MORALITY” (*FIN.* 2.48–50)

After providing his own account of morality (*honestas*) at 2.45–47, Cicero discusses Epicurus’ account of the meaning of that term (*Fin.* 2.48):

hanc se tuus Epicurus omnino ignorare dicit quam aut qualem esse velint qui honestate summum bonum metiantur. si enim ad honestatem omnia referant neque in ea voluptatem dicant inesse, ait eos voce inani sonare (his enim ipsis verbis utitur) neque intellegere nec videre sub hanc vocem honestatis quae sit subicienda sententia. ut enim consuetudo loquitur, id solum dicitur honestum quod est populari fama gloriosum. quod, inquit, quamquam voluptatibus quibusdam est saepe iucundius, tamen expetitur propter voluptatem.

As for those who measure the greatest good by morality, your Epicurus says that he has no idea what nature or what character they want morality to have. For if they refer all things to morality, and deny that pleasure is included in it, he says that they utter empty words (he uses these exact words), and that they neither see nor understand what meaning should be subordinated to the term “morality.”<sup>47</sup> For according to ordinary usage, only that which is renowned by popular acclaim is called “moral.” “And such renown,” says Epicurus, “though often more charming than some pleasures, is nonetheless sought for the sake of pleasure.”

46. Diogenes of Oinoanda (NF 192) suggests that one Epicurean response to such criticism was simply to assert that to use the term “pleasure” to mean absence of pain is to use it in its ordinary meaning: see Taylor 2014, 88.

47. This sentence has been widely misinterpreted: Martha (1928), Rackham (1914), Atzert (1964), Gigon and Straume-Zimmerman (1988), and Woolf (2001) all translate as though Epicurus himself (rather than *eos*) were the subject of the infinitives *videre* and *intellegere*. This cannot be the case: the following sentence makes it clear that Epicurus believes himself to know precisely what opinion should be subordinated to the term “morality”; it is those who fail to include pleasure in their conception of morality who lack such knowledge.

Once again we find Cicero employing the language of Epicurean procedure evidenced at *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37–38, with *voce inani* mirroring Epicurus’ κενούς φθόγγους (acknowledged by Cicero as a *verbatim* quotation), and a form of *subicio* rendering ὑποτάσσω. Epicurus’ argument, as reported by Cicero, relies on an explicit appeal to ordinary language (*consuetudo*): ordinarily, only that which is *populari fama gloriosus* is called *honestus*; that which is *populari fama gloriosus* is sought on account of pleasure; therefore, on the ordinary meaning of *honestus*, that which is *honestus* is sought on account of pleasure. As a result, anyone who does not include pleasure in their conception of morality “utters empty words”<sup>48</sup> and “neither sees nor understands what meaning should be subordinated to the term ‘morality’” (that is, they do not understand the correct—which is to say, ordinary—meaning of the term). This is familiar Epicurean procedure: focusing on the ordinary meaning of a term will enable the preconception underlying that term to be recognized, which will in turn reveal the nature of the term’s referent.

Cicero’s response, as before (see above, Part 4), is to deny that Epicurus has successfully understood the ordinary meaning of the term in question and, as such, has failed to live up to his own procedural standards. In the following paragraph, Cicero denies Epicurus’ claim that only that which is *populari fama gloriosus* may be called *honestus*, insisting that an act may be called *honestus* even if others remain silent about it, or are ignorant of it altogether (*Fin.* 2.49):

non ob eam causam tamen illud dici esse honestum quia laudetur a multis, sed quia tale sit ut, vel si ignorarent id homines vel si obmutuissent, sua tamen pulchritudine esset specieque laudabile.

Yet [I say that] the reason it is called “moral” is not that it is praised by the multitude but because it is the kind of thing that, even if men were unaware of it or remained silent about it, would nonetheless be praiseworthy due to its own beauty and splendor.

This echoes the opening sentences of Cicero’s own account of morality at 2.45–47, where Cicero describes morality with an appeal to the “common judgement of all” (*commune omnium iudicium*): a moral act is an act that is praiseworthy on its own account regardless of any benefit it may bring to the agent. Epicurus’ appeal to *consuetudo* at 2.48 is thus shown to be mistaken, given that his account of *consuetudo* (“only that which is renowned by popular acclaim is called ‘moral’”) fails to accord with the common judgement of all men concerning the nature of morality. While Cicero’s account of morality at 2.45–47 begins with a definition, the power of this definition to reveal the nature of morality, says Cicero, is limited (*Fin.* 2.45):

quod quale sit non tam definitione qua sum usus intellegi potest, quamquam aliquantum potest, quam communi omnium iudicio et optimi cuiusque studiis atque factis, qui permulta ob eam unam causam faciunt quia decet, quia rectum, quia honestum est, etsi nullum consecuturum emolumentum vident.

48. For empty words in Epicurus, see (in addition to *Ep. Hdt.* 37) *Cic. Tusc.* 3.42 (Usener 69); *Plut. Mor.* 1091a (Usener 423).

What kind of thing [morality] is may be understood not so much from the definition I have given (although that may help a little) as from the common judgment of all and from the aims and deeds of the best people, who do a great many things for the sole reason that it is proper, right, and moral, even though they realize that no benefit to themselves will follow from it.

Even if Epicurus had embraced definitions as valuable tools in inquiry, they would have provided him with little help here. In this case, the best standard for determining the nature of morality is that which Epicurus claims to have adopted: the conception of morality that is shared by all men. The problem is that Epicurus' account of morality, as reported at 2.48, does not match the common conception. Cicero's skeptical attitude to the value of definitions in this case contrasts with his positive attitude toward them as stated earlier in the same book (2.3–5, on which see Part 3 above).<sup>49</sup> This downplaying of the value of definitions, accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the importance of common conceptions, may be explained with reference to Cicero's dialectical approach: the claim here is not that Epicurus should have used definitions (although they would have provided a little help), but rather that he should have lived up to his own stated principles of using terms in their universally agreed-upon senses.

Cicero continues his response to the argument of 2.48 by attempting to show that Epicurus, as he is reported there, has in fact failed to recognize his own actual conception of morality. Torquatus has claimed that, for an Epicurean, it is impossible to live pleasantly without morality.<sup>50</sup> But, says Cicero, it would be disgraceful (*turpe*) for the happy life of the wise man to depend on the discourse of the unwise. As such, Epicurus cannot have meant that it is impossible to live pleasantly without popular acclaim (*Fin.* 2.50):

non is vir est ut, cum honestatem eo loco habeat ut sine ea iucunde neget posse vivi, illud honestum quod populare sit sentiat et sine eo neget iucunde vivi posse, aut quicquam aliud honestum intellegat nisi quod sit rectum ipsumque per se, sua vi, sua natura, sua sponte laudabile.

Nor is he such a man that, when he grants such a status to morality that he says one cannot live a pleasant life without it, he is equating what is moral with what is popular and saying that one cannot live a pleasant life without popularity; in fact, he understands the moral to be nothing other than what is correct and praiseworthy in and of itself, by its own power and its own nature.

The moralizing language of *virilitas* is part of a broader pattern of condescension in *De finibus* 2 wherein Cicero states that Torquatus and Epicurus are better men than their doctrines would suggest.<sup>51</sup> Epicurus' actual conception of morality, says Cicero here, is that it is "correct and praiseworthy in and of itself, by its own power and its own nature"; that is, precisely the same as the *commune omnium iudicium* concerning morality outlined by Cicero at

49. See Selem 1962, 128.

50. *Fin.* 1.57; cf. Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 132; *RS* 5.

51. For Torquatus, see 2.80–81; for Epicurus, see 2.96–99, 102; cf. *Cic. Off.* 1.5.

2.45 and 2.49. As far as Cicero is concerned, therefore, Epicurus does in fact possess a correct conception of morality; the problem is that he fails to realize this fact, and relies instead on a conception of morality (and a corresponding usage of the word “morality”) that is false. This brings us back to the question, discussed above in Part 2, of how inquirers are able to distinguish between their preconceptions and any other conceptions they may possess. It was suggested there that paying attention to the primary conception of a word (which, in normal cases, will be connected to that word’s ordinary meaning) provided Epicureans with a method for distinguishing preconceptions (which all appropriately experienced individuals will possess) from their other conceptions. Cicero’s appeal to the *commune omnium iudicium* at 2.45 should be interpreted as an appeal to just such a universally held conception of morality, which is compared at 2.48–50 with Epicurus’ own false conception. As we have seen, at *Epistula ad Menoeceum* 123–24, Epicurus drew a distinction between inquirers who rely on their preconceptions (προλήψεις) and those who rely on mere supposition (ὑπόληψις). One of the aims of Cicero’s criticism of the Epicurean account of morality at 2.48–50 is to place Epicurus himself in the latter group, as one who possesses a correct conception of the matter at hand but fails to rely on it during inquiry, relying instead on erroneous supposition. For Cicero, therefore, Epicurus’ idiosyncratic understanding of the meaning of “morality” directly conflicts with his own stated philosophical principles, and the inclusion of language (at 2.48) appropriated from Epicurus’ procedural note at *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37–38 highlights precisely this point. This is closely similar to the dialectical strategy discussed above in the case of “pleasure”: appropriating Epicurean language and procedure in order to demonstrate how Epicurus has failed to live up to his own standards. While Epicurus accuses those who fail to include pleasure in their conception of morality of “uttering empty words,” it is in fact he himself who has failed to grasp the universally agreed-upon meaning of the term “morality”—this despite his own professed belief in using terms in their ordinary senses.

#### CONCLUSION

The issues of definition and ordinary language were closely linked in Epicurean procedural doctrine. The transparent connections thought to exist between terms and preconceptions, preconceptions and the world, motivated Epicurus’ decision to reject definition as procedurally unnecessary. Cicero’s employment of Epicurus’ methodological terminology at *De finibus* 2.6, 2.13, and 2.48 demonstrates his familiarity with Epicurean philosophical procedure and the theories that underlie it.<sup>52</sup> There is much in those underlying theories that Cicero, as an Academic, would have rejected, perhaps most obviously the existence of self-evident, commonly-held preconceptions about the natures of things. We have seen, however, that (true to his Academic approach)

52. NB the wording of 2.6: [*Epicurus*] *qui crebro dicat . . .*, and see also the quotation from Epicurus’ Περὶ τέλους at Cic. *Tusc.* 3.41–42 (Usener 67, 69).

Cicero does not attack these doctrines head-on, but rather seeks to demonstrate how Epicurus regularly fails to live up to his professed procedural standards, whether by failing to provide the necessary tools (i.e., definition) to establish agreement at the outset of inquiry (something Epicurus claims to believe necessary), or by using terms in ways that do not accord with their accepted meanings, while professing to believe ordinary language to be valuable for doing philosophy.

The approach is dialectical and *ad hominem*. In the case of Epicurus' rejection of definition (dealt with in Part 3), it fails through Cicero's misrepresentation of the Epicurean position at 2.3–4, where he overemphasizes the role of outlines and fails to mention preconceptions at all. A doctrinaire Epicurean would have no trouble rejecting the argument of 2.3–5 on these grounds. In the cases of Epicurus' usage (dealt with in Parts 4 and 5), however, it is rather more successful: it is hard to see how Epicurus could be consistent in claiming an important role for ordinary language in his philosophical methodology while simultaneously employing central terms such as "pleasure" and "morality" in ways that appeared idiosyncratic and unfamiliar to non-Epicureans.

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