

# All Pleasure Is Desirable, Because It Is Pleasing To Us, But Is All Pleasure \*Equally\* Desirable?

Post by "Pivot" of May 11, 2018 at 4:09 AM

I could not agree more that this is an extremely important issue because of the implications of each of our viewpoints. It's an argument about the best way to live in the end - a life free from pain, or a life minimizing pain but striving for pleasures?

It can be reasonably assumed Epicurus underwent significant struggle and difficulty in creating and defending these doctrines which have survived for millennia. If he were to weigh freedom from pain as the highest pleasure, wouldn't he have been better off to live a withdrawn life free from all struggles?

I would say no. Perhaps to be free from pain, Epicurus NEEDED to do these things and go through these struggles (ie, natural and necessary desire). To live any other way would leave him unfulfilled and in a state of constant pain or emptiness. Perhaps his motivation was freedom from pain, too.

1. I agree that absence of pain is a measure of quantity in that the quantity of painful experiences is 0 or near 0. "But nothing is more delightful than to possess sanctuaries which are lofty, peaceful, and well fortified by the teachings of the wise" (DRN 2.7). Sanctuaries of course meaning freedom from pain. I do not think that quote from the Letter to Menoecus contradicts this. Before it reads: "The thought of life is no offense to him, nor is the cessation of life regarded as an evil." I do not think this quote is saying that intensity of pleasure outweighs freedom from pain, as freedom from pain is not necessarily implied in the longer lifespan. I agree in that it says magnitude trumps length.

2. The quote "And often we consider pains superior to pleasures when submission to the pains for a long time brings us as a consequence a greater pleasure" is in congruence with the interpretation that freedom from pain is the most important consideration, I believe. Let us imagine a simple case where a man must farm wheat and slaughter cattle to have food for his family. This is a pain he chooses because the pleasure afterwards outweighs it. To be most free from pain, the man must pursue this inconvenience.

There is a distinction between types of pleasure: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, unnatural and necessary, and unnatural and unnecessary. It is advisable to go through pain for a greater pleasure when that pleasure is natural and necessary, such as food for one's family. However, when you suggest that natural and unnecessary pleasures should be sought out, implying that it is okay to desire them, I have to disagree. I have gathered that you are a very strict utilitarian when it comes to these things - greater pleasure should always be sought and desired. I do not think Epicurus believes this - I think he believes natural and

unnecessary pleasures should not be desired, nor sought except at intervals; in fact, this is one of his most beautiful and enlightening doctrines that I've come to admire. But allow me to extend an olive branch before making my argument that this is indeed what Epicurus believes: I would say that Epicurus believes that seeking for natural and unnecessary pleasures is NOT maximizing OVERALL greater pleasure.

Here is the quote which supports my argument. It is long, but you have read it before, no doubt, and I would like to put it here because it is so pertinent:

“Again, we regard independence of outward things as a great good, not so as in all cases to use little, but so as to be contented with little if we have not much, being honestly persuaded that they have the sweetest enjoyment of luxury who stand least in need of it, and that whatever is natural is easily procured and only the vain and worthless hard to win. Plain fare gives as much pleasure as a costly diet, when once the pain of want has been removed, while bread and water confer the highest possible pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips. To habituate one's self, therefore, to simple and inexpensive diet supplies all that is needful for health, and enables a man to meet the necessary requirements of life without shrinking, and it places us in a better condition when we approach at intervals a costly fare and renders us fearless of fortune.”

A costly diet would be a natural and unnecessary desire. Epicurus says here that removing the desire for unnecessary pleasures (ie, a costly diet) is a better condition because of two reasons. 1) It allows us to take pleasure in unnecessary desires at intervals, because if we no longer desire them then their deprivation will not cause pain. 2) It protects us from fortune, which is fickle.

The idea is that we will eventually grow acclimated to these unnecessary pleasures, at which point they become our baseline and no longer are as pleasing as they once were. Then the pain we invest into them is not going into a pleasure at all, but it is being invested only to free us from the pain of not having these pleasures. Which brings me to the next argument:

Your claim is that freedom from pain = pleasure. I agree that being free from pain is A pleasure. But I 100% disagree that in increasing pleasure we are becoming increasingly free from pain. Pain is a positive experience. If we break our leg, we feel pain. It is not like air in a jar, where if you remove some pleasurable experience, more pain manifests itself. That is why I disagree with the jar analogy. If I remove jelly beans (pleasurable experiences) from the jar, I create more air in the jar (pain). That is false on the face of it the way I see it. If I'm eating ice cream and I finish the ice-cream, thereby ending that pleasurable experience, am I creating pain? The jelly bean was removed, and air filled its place, so according to your model I would be creating pain by finishing my ice cream.

Forgive me also if I have argued different things in different posts - I am working these issues out and growing as I talk about them, and I wouldn't want to limit myself to something I said if I believe it to be wrong later.