

NPR Fresh Air: Dr. Anna Lembke on pleasure, pain, and addiction

Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2021 at 3:51 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Like different flavors of ice cream?

Don also I think we have to take into account here also the "purity" or "pure pleasure" or "unalloyed" issue that is addressed in [PD12](#) and [PD14](#) and I think other places as well.

And this in turn probably stems from the purity argument by Plato in [Philebus](#).

The issue in contention seems to derive from some logical argument that having something without any mixture of something else is superior or better than having it mixed with something that is less desirable. Probably this is related to the contention that in order to be a highest good, it indeed has to be highest and not capable of improvement. Thus in order to discuss the highest state of pleasure possible, logically the pleasure experience which is best must be unalloyed and not combined with anything else (actual or fear of interruption or pain).

I know it is tedious to constantly refer back to Platonic logical arguments, but I think that is exactly what Epicurus would have had to face in ancient Athens. Due to that he needed to either inoculate his students against the argument or deprogram them if they had already fallen for it. And the evidence for that is right there in [Philebus](#) which appears to be Plato's number one work denouncing pleasure as the goal of life. I would estimate the challenge would be similar to what we face today in many places in dealing with presumptions created by the Bible.

With of course the ultimate reason for the argument always going back to the "what is the greatest good?" formulation. In order to have an answer to that question which meets the Platonic objections, we have to have a description of a way of experiencing pleasure that is both unalloyed (with no pain) and continuous (with no disturbance).

If you're experiencing pleasure with any mixture of pain or interruption, then you're saying that this pleasure experience could be improved, and if it can be improved then it's not the best, and if it's not the best then it's not the "greatest good."

All of that is largely a word game, but for someone devoted to logical analysis it's a game you find yourself playing as part of philosophy.

Better just to point at puppies and kittens and babies and say "See, unperverted life pursues pleasure and avoids pain" but Torquatus says that some people (even some who call

themselves Epicureans) say that that's not a good enough argument.