

An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2021 at 3:33 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

So wouldn't all the talk of duration, intensity, absence of pain and so forth really be misleading? At least it seems so in terms of daily living. Analyzing one's desires would be far more useful and effective in determining how to live pleasurably. Continuous pleasure just means, at least in this line of reasoning, that one is living well by prudently choosing and fleeing from one's desires.

My initial reaction to splitting the discussion of desires and their results is to be wary of that, because just like virtue, what does it gain anything to talk about desires apart from the results of pursuing those desires? In the end there is nothing given by nature for the decision of what to choose and to avoid other than pleasure and pain. A science of desires separated from their consequences, would be no more helpful or useful than a science of virtue, apart from the results of pursuing those virtues.

Further and to the same point, since there is no "necessity" in human affairs, there is no more necessity as to the result of pursuing a particular desire "in general" than there is ability to predict by necessity that Hermarchus must be either alive or dead tomorrow. Certainly generalizations and predictions can be given, but absent a necessary connection between any desire and its result, we can't derive an ironclad rule, and the best we can do is make the generalization -- which is useful, but not really deeply philosophical, as it is largely dependent on context.

So rather than say that talk of duration, intensity, absence of pain and so forth might be misleading, I could see the argument as stronger that they are really all that is worth talking about, because they are the only ways of evaluating pleasures vs pains that make particular choices "good" or "bad" (in the sense of nothing good but pleasure; nothing bad but pain).

So one of the foundational issues here is whether "Are all pleasures the same in all respects so that we should consider the choice of any to be the equivalent of the choice of any other?"

I would say the answer to that is "No!" They share a certain attribute (we find them all pleasing) but not in the same degree, manner, intensity, duration, etc.

At least as for me, I definitely choose my pleasures according to those characteristics and I do not pursue all pleasures with the same intensity. Does anyone advocate that Epicurus held that we should?

Here we need to dive back into DeWitt's "Unity of Pleasure" chapter.