

An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by "Godfrey" of October 8, 2021 at 2:22 AM

Quote from Cassius

But in the end, the whole exercise is nothing more than posing the same question: How much pain is my chosen pleasure going to cost me to obtain? And in that, you rank the intensity and satisfaction you get from your pleasure, and you rank the intensity and length of the pain it is going to cost you, and you make a totally personal and subjective decision based on your own unique circumstances.

The result (to me) is that you've performed a mental exercise that really does nothing but help you reflect on what you expect to be the pleasure and pain that you yourself expect to experience, and you decide to go forward or not on that basis.

I agree with much of this, but I still think that there are subtle but useful differences between desire and pleasure.

- Pleasure is a Feeling, a faculty, a criterion or measurement. Desire is not.
- To my limited understanding, pleasure and desire are neurologically/biochemically different.
- Pleasure is "The Goal", desire is not.
- As a Feeling and as "The Goal", pleasure is what organisms strive for from birth in order to thrive. Desire is something that can be either good or bad, and often needs to be reined in.
- For me, when considering whether or not to do or partake of a given thing, there's a significant difference between thinking of something as a desire as opposed to a pleasure. Thinking of it as a pleasure, which is inherently good, means that it is worth pursuing on its own merits but may end up involving more pain than pleasure. Thinking of it as a desire, which I posit that it is until it is experienced, means that it may not even be worth pursuing on its own merits. For me, this greatly simplifies decision making. For someone else it may not. I see the exercise of evaluating desires, which Epicurus proposes through the use of his categories, as more "scientifically" (for lack of a better word at the moment) and psychologically sound than trying to rank duration and intensity of pleasures and pains. At a minimum, it provides an alternative method for choosing and avoiding. The bottom line I imagine is to work with and compare both methods.
- Again for me, I find evaluating desires to be good for a first pass at choosing. Sometimes that's all that I do, other times I take another pass and consider pleasures v pains. It's something of a process.