

# Pleasure, Desire and Limits

Post by "Cassius" of July 18, 2022 at 1:34 PM

Well so as not to leave this question up in the air for too long without giving my answer, I personally think the answer lies in the obvious as to pleasure and pain. The goal of life is to live as nearly as possible along the pattern described by Torquatus (which is so close to the letter to Menoecus that I see no reason to doubt it's reliability):

"Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement."

Advanced beings higher than ourselves may be able to actualize a life such as this combined with complete freedom from pain, but we as humans cannot. Therefore it is up to us to as best we can approach the goal at the cost of experiencing some pains. The precise mix of pleasures and pains open to us is contextual, and our appetites for pleasure and tolerance for pain are individual. In a universe without fate or supernatural gods or absolute perspectives or right and wrong, we each are left by Nature to pursue pleasure and avoid pain on such terms as we ourselves decide to be appropriate. At the end of the road our lives are over, and if we have a chance to reflect on our past before we die, we are going to want to think that we did the best we could under our own circumstances to have exerted all our mental and physical energies to have lived as well as possible.

It's interesting to note that in that summary there is no distinction between kinetic and katastematic - just the positive presence of numerous and vivid pleasures of every type of both body and mind. Nor is there any drawing out in detail of a description of absence of pain or absence of disturbance - other than the obvious role that these can be used to describe a life that is full of experiencing normal pleasures of all kinds without interruption. Nor is there any discussion of natural and necessary or limitations of desires - these are practical tools that we as humans must come up with and apply intelligently to our circumstances, but they aren't part of the philosophic definition of the ultimate goal. They are contextual and will differ in application from person to person and place to place and time to time.