

Episode 195 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 05

Post by "Cassius" of October 11, 2023 at 3:55 AM

To consult DeWitt's perspective on this if we choose to, we are probably talking about the section entitled "Unity of Pleasure" starting page 232, which includes this below, which incorporates the k/k distinction as a reference to "intensity." Dewitt seems to be suggesting that the same type of feeling of pleasure or pain is being considered acute / intense / kinetic if experienced over a short time and is being considered less acute / less intense / katastematic if experienced over a longer time:

Quote

To substantiate this drift of reasoning it is not impossible to quote a text: "The stable condition of well-being in the flesh and the confident hope of its continuance means the most exquisite and infallible of joys for those who are capable of figuring the problem out."

This passage marks a distinct increase of precision in the analysis of pleasure. Its import will become clear if the line of reasoning already adumbrated be properly extended: let it be granted that the escape from a violent death is the greatest of joys and the inference must follow that the possession of life at other times cannot rank greatly lower.

Similarly, if the recovery from a dangerous illness be a cause for joy, manifestly the possession of health ought to be a joy at other times. Nevertheless the two pleasures differ from one another and it was in recognition of the difference that Epicurus instituted the distinction between kinetic and static pleasures. The difference is one of intensity or, as Epicurus would have said, of condensation. At one time the pleasure is condensed, at another, extended. In other words the same pleasure may be either kinetic or static. If condensed, it is kinetic; if extended, it is static.

There is a catch to this reasoning, however; it holds good only "for those who are capable of figuring the problem out:" This marks Epicurus as a pragmatist, insisting upon the control of experience, including thought. His reasoning about kinetic and static pleasures is sound, but human beings do not automatically reason after this fashion; they fail to reason about the matter at all. Although they would spontaneously admit the keenest joy at recovery from wounds or disease. they forget about the blessing of health at other times. Hence it is that Epicurus insists upon the necessity of being able to reason in this way. Moreover. this reasoning must be confirmed by

habituation. The same rule applies here as in the case of "[Death is nothing to us:](#)" It is not enough to master the reasons for so believing; it is also necessary to habituate one's self to so believe. This is pragmatism.

Under this view it looks to me like you are definitely acknowledging differences in intensity of pleasures and pains, so you are not being unrealistic and acting as if that difference is not there, but you are mentally conditioning yourself to view them as similar in nature because this mental perspective allows you to appreciate whichever you have under a particular circumstance.

"And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided.

[130] Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good. And again independence of desire we think a great good — not that we may at all times enjoy but a few things, but that, if we do not possess many, we may enjoy the few in the genuine persuasion that those have the sweetest pleasure in luxury who least need it, and that all that is natural is easy to be obtained, but that which is superfluous is hard. And so plain savours bring us a pleasure equal to a luxurious diet, when all the pain due to want is removed; and bread and water produce the highest pleasure, when one who needs them puts them to his lips.

[131] To grow accustomed therefore to simple and not luxurious diet gives us health to the full, and makes a man alert for the needful employments of life, and when after long intervals we approach luxuries disposes us better towards them, and fits us to be fearless of fortune."

So of course you are going to engage in "sex, drugs, and rocknroll" when you can do so without experiencing more pain than pleasure, but if for any reason you are not able to engage in them without causing yourself more pain than pleasure, you are going to have no reason to regret your choice to decline because you can make up for that declined pleasure by finding compensating pleasure in other activities. The focus of your decisionmaking is always on maximizing the predominance of pleasure over pain in total, and you aren't inherently favoring intense over non-intense or non-intense over intense. You're just picking a mix between the two that under your circumstances will produce the greatest pleasure.