

"Absence Of Pain Is Pleasure" - How Would You Articulate That To Someone?

Post by "Cassius" of November 17, 2023 at 9:04 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

The recent in-depth discussions of "absence of pain = pleasure" have given me a new perspective on the katastematic/kinetic "debate." The health of the body and the tranquillity of the mind *is* katastematic pleasure. The "normal" functioning of freedom from pain in body and mind that has been discussed *is* katastematic pleasure. "Absence of pain" in the mind is literally ataraxia which Epicurus gives as an example of *a* katastematic pleasure.

Yes I think this is the way things are going, and I think we are essentially in total agreement. Expressing these things is tricky and that's where we can get better with practice. For example in Kalosyni's post above as to how to describe "mixed situations" I think we have to be careful and precise, and it relates back to the discussion we had recently about how to evaluate things that are going on simultaneously, like the separate pains and pleasures of Epicurus' last day.

Part of the weight that remains to be removed from the "absence of pain" terminology is how to flip back and forth easily between seeing that you don't have to expect every ounce of pleasure from life before you can experience any pleasure, but on the other hand it is proper and helpful to talk about exactly that -- the theoretical goal IS to expel every ounce of pain, at which you would have reached the limit of pleasure.

I think that's what can be confusing about the way Cicero's Torquatus is flipping so quickly from saying "the absence of pain is pleasure" to saying "the absence of pain is in fact the HIGHEST pleasure."

At least for me, I am not yet familiar enough with the dual implications to move from one to the other and back again without confusing the issue and thinking that, "Well if I can't hit the highest pleasure without expelling every ounce of pain, then there is a "kind of pleasure" that I'll never reach, because I am afraid I am never going to be 100% successful at expelling all pain."

Apparently there is something in my thought process (not sure what yet) that makes me think that "the perfect is the enemy of the good" and that there is a tension between 100% pleasure and 99% pleasure (another title of a recent thread). Somehow the theoretical goal of 100% pleasure seems an insult to 99% pleasure, and yet I think it would make no sense at all that somehow it takes a totally different set of tools and actions to achieve 100% pleasure rather

than 99% pleasure.

The Buddhist/Stoic planted implication is that the only way to reach 100% pleasure is by being an ascetic, because only by denying yourself most of the ordinary pleasures of life will you never have any disappointment or letdown, and you're infinitely better off doing so rather than living a life of 99% normal pleasurable activities. All of that is because 100% is infinitely better and more to be chosen than 99%. And I think that makes no sense and it's no way it could have been Epicurus' position.

"Absence of pain" sounds to me (maybe conditioned by religion?) like an absolutist position, and yet Torquatus and apparently the ancient Epicureans are flipping right from "anything that is not painful is pleasurable" to "and to be totally without pain is the greatest pleasure."

I think seeing how "being totally without pain is the greatest pleasure" relates to "anything that is not pain is pleasure" remains to be the subject of a lot of discussion and essays and memes and explanations to make that more clear.

And that's what reminded me to repost the "[Perspectives Chart](#)" I started working on. It needs total reworking but this issue is what is driving that -- making clear how to get comfortable with flipping between constructions that say "the absence of pain is pleasure, and indeed the greatest pleasure." That "indeed" reflects a perspective we have to learn.