

# Is All "Ataraxia" Equal?

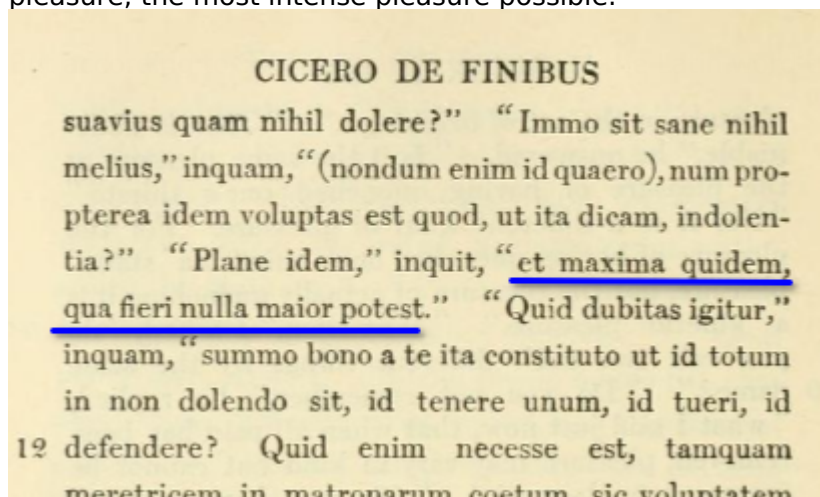
Post by "Cassius" of November 19, 2023 at 8:08 PM

I think it could be fruitful to look at the words being translated as "intensity" to see if they might perhaps be more related to issues of quantity or limit rather than what we might term "sharpness" or "depth of feeling."

I see, for example, that one of the phrases currently on the top of the forum uses the word intensity:

On Ends Book 2, III - Rackham / Loeb

Cicero: Still, granting that there is nothing better (that point I waive for the moment), surely it does not therefore follow that what I may call the negation of pain is the same thing as pleasure?" Torquatus: "Absolutely the same, indeed the negation of pain is a very intense pleasure, the most intense pleasure possible."



ere is "maxima" .....

... and given our discussions lately I think we need to be careful about how we are interpreting what "maximum pleasure" refers to.

It seems to me that it is easy to understand that if we are talking about "all our awareness" then if 100% of our awareness is engaged in feeling pleasure, then that would be the limit of pleasure.

However (and this of course the point we are discussing now) if there are various types of pleasure, and we aren't specifying whether 100% of our awareness is occupied with fingernail clipping or joy of mind in conversing with our friends, then we need to be aware that there

might be varying types of maximum pleasure.

Again this is easy to see I think in regard to thinking about the example that Epicurus on his last day was experiencing both pleasure (of mind) and pain (of body) and offsetting one against the other. We're constantly in day to day life offsetting pleasures against pain. There is no 'salvation' or "sum of it all" moment in which everything gets added up to a "final" tally. It seems to me that there is no "Total absence of pain" except as a thought construction that doesn't happen unless you sit around thinking about your life in summary, and doesn't exist except in your conceptualization of it.

So if Epicurus was equating "absence of pain" with "pleasure" he was likely referring at least as much to everyday discrete experiences as he was to some theoretical summary of a person's life (if indeed he ever thought in those terms at all).

If all or a significant part of this reasoning is true, then I think that when we do choose to talk about 100% pleasure = total absence of pain we should be talking about discrete "slices of life," and that would mean that "absence of pain," even though described as 100% and therefore at a maximum of quantity, is saying nothing regarding the quality of what I think most of us mean when we use the word "intensity."

At the hazard of this being a tangent I am reminded of color controls on a television (at least old style CRT TVs I grew up with). Televisions have controls for [Color/Hue, Saturation and Brightness](#). Is there a possible analogy that "pure pleasure" is like "pure yellow" in that it is 100% yellow? The yellow control may be set at 100% yellow, yet the various settings of "saturation" and "brightness" of the yellow make the different settings readily distinguishable. So my question to throw out there would be:

*When [PD09](#) refers to "intensity," location, and duration, are we talking about how pleasures differ from one another and how saying "absence of pain = 100% pleasure" does not tell us all we need to know about which pleasure to choose?*

[PD09](#). If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted, and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another. [\[3\]](#)

Edit: I am saying several things in this post so let me separate them:

(1) I am doubting that "intensity" is the best word for us to use in saying that "the total absence of pain is the most intense pleasure." Most people don't translate [PD03](#) as saying "the most intense pleasure is the absence of pain," they say "limit of quantity of pleasure." Seems to me that the more likely analogy is that "the total absence of pain is the "purest" pleasure, and whether we perceive it to be the most "intense feeling " needs to be a subject of discussion over what "intense" really means. I doubt most people consider "intense" feeling to be the same as the most "pure" feeling.

(2) The related point is that when the Epicureans were making statements to the effect that "the highest pleasure is the total absence of pain" that word "highest" is not meant to imply that there is an absolute scale of pleasure that everyone experiences in the same way. What is highest for one person may be totally different for another person, and whether we are talking about "ataraxia" or "the highest pleasure" status for even a single person may be different for that same person at different times and circumstances (and therefore we should act accordingly to distinguish and pursue the type we feel to be most pleasurable to us).

Maybe this all resolves down to the question: "Is 'the limit of pleasure' the same experience for everyone?" Maybe the answer to that is clearly no, and I am simply feeling the need to make the issue clear because I am under the continuing influence of the religious and romantic and egalitarian idea that everyone has access to the same type of "salvation experience" basking in the presence of god." At this point in my efforts to apply Epicurus' views consistently, I cannot imagine that he held that to be the case, but the issue seems so important that this conclusion should not be left to implication.