

Tips On Offsetting Pleasures Against Pains

Post by "Don" of November 28, 2023 at 6:09 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

In English "pleasure" can go up and down in intensity, duration, location (at least).

To say that "absence of pain" is "the same as" pleasure" would imply that it too can go up and down.

Agreed. And that's implied in the Epicurean texts since:

PD3: The limit of pleasure (hedone) is the removal of all pains (algos). Wherever and for however long pleasure (hedone) is present, there is neither "algos" nor "lupe."

I'm purposefully leaving those Greek words to express the all-encompassing nature:

algos: "pain (of either mind or body), sorrow, trouble, grief, distress, woe."

lupe: "grief, sadness; pain (of mind or body), suffering, affliction, distress"

But PD3 implies that both pleasure and pain "go up and down," to the limit where all distress, trouble, grief, sadness, suffering has been eliminated in both body and mind. And it is the "limit" of pleasure! Which, again, implies there's pleasure all along the spectrum, from being completely overcome by suffering and pain to being completely filled with nothing but pleasure.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But to then state that "absence of pain" is "the highest" or "most intense" pleasure indicates that it is at a fixed position (at least to my way of reading).

The total absence of pain *is* the "highest" limit of pleasure. That's by definition. No pain = maximum pleasure. Yonge has "Torquatus" say "painlessness is the greatest of pleasures which no other can possibly exceed." Which is Cicero's clever wordplay as far as I'm concerned using his new word. But "absence of all pain" is the "greatest" of pleasure simply because there is no more room for pain to exist, pleasure has completely filled the cup to the brim. That's why pleasure, when pain is gone, can only be varied.

That "highest notch" you refer to is just "the limit of pleasure" = "total absence of pain." It's not a special state, just the brim of the cup.

In reading (and re-reading and re-reading and..) that quote from Epicurus's *On Choice*, I don't necessarily think ataraxia and aponia are being given special status. The only "special" status

given to the stable pleasures of "peace of mind" and "freedom from exertion" are that we just experience them. We don't have to "do" anything to experience the pleasure of them. We just have to notice that they're there. There a state of being, not a thing you do.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

It's that issue -- that you want the highest but will take what you can get - that I sense needs to be made more clear in order for the terminology and the system to be made as clear as possible.

Fair enough. Maybe that's why the "gods" are held up as an archetype or paragon of what that limit of pleasure, that total absence of pain, suffering, and exertion could look like. We mortals can never attain that. Epicurus certainly didn't experience that! He suffered physical pain and suffered, but he knew how to "play the game" (for lack of a better way of putting it) to fill his cup with the most amount of pleasure, both in his stable anxiety-free mind and in his choice of what active pleasures to pursue and which to reject.