

Mental pleasure/pain more intense and longer lasting than physical pleasure/pain

Post by "Cassius" of December 13, 2023 at 4:04 PM

Yes Don's post gets right to the point. If you are the type of person who values the longer-term "satisfaction" that comes from your actions, then what you are talking about is just a different name for the feeling that you get from that work.

The real heart of the matter is whether the Platonists and others were right to label only agreeable immediate sensory stimulation as pleasure and disagreeable immediate sensory stimulation as pain. Epicurus goes right to the heart of the matter and says that it is the **feeling** that is the ultimate way to decide, not your "intellectual" assessment of it by some abstract logical standard.

And it is equally important to say that we aren't playing simple word games with "pleasure." Sometimes it can sound like that because we have first-world attitudes privileges that lead us to think that rearranging our kitchens and our recipes to produce maximum eating pleasure is all we need to worry about.

Epicurus was a **philosopher**, not a cook or a medical doctor. The big issues that drive the world in his time and in ours are the ultimate questions of whether (1) there are supernatural gods, (2) whether there is life after death with reward or punishment, (3) whether there are logical absolute ideals, or (4) whether there is only what Nature gives us directly by which we should live.

Epicurus held that if we want to deal with reality then (1), (2), and (3) are out of the question, as they simply do not exist given the nature of the universe. That leaves us with (4) which resolves down to "feeling" and it ultimately makes sense to realize that there are really only two types of feelings, those that are agreeable (Pleasure) and those that are disagreeable (Pain).

We're talking in this thread in very precise medical terms as if Epicurus were standing over our shoulder pointing out specific things to do and not to do, even though he lived 2000 years ago and had no idea of the technology we have and the way we live today. Certainly he had specific pieces of advice to the effect that seeking unlimited power, unlimited money, unlimited fame, or to live forever are unattainable and will be damaging if we make them our goals. We can derive a lot of useful "life coach" information from what he had to say.

But if you skip over the ultimate philosophical war in favor of the clinical details then you never understand the big picture. The big picture is FIRST that these false guides of life do not exist. That in itself is a very heavy lift for most people. The flag that Epicurus raises is indeed called

"Pleasure" but that's a generic term for agreeable mental and bodily feelings, and those do exist, and they stand in the same rank and compete with the alternatives of supernatural gods and ideal forms and "logic" and "virtue" and things like that which either do not exist or are at best tools for something else.

In the end it's very possible to reconcile "satisfaction" and "worthwhile things" etc etc with "pleasure," and if you spend time with Epicurus you will see how he does that.

What's *NOT* possible to reconcile with Epicurus is supernatural gods, and ideal forms, and essences and logical abstractions and any other sort of absolutist things or principles that can tell us what to do.

The title of Lucretius' Poem is generally translated as "The Nature of Things" -- but Rolphe Humphries translates it as "The Way Things Are" and I'd say also something like "The Nature of Reality" are more indicative of what is really at stake.

Atoms and void and all the theories that come from them give us ways to come to terms with reality, and that's the first and most important goal. Once you orient yourself to the reality that the only guide you have is the physical pleasure and pain that Nature gives you, it's relatively easy to come up with a rational pleasure and pain analysis of all the rest. But the nature of reality is the place to start -- the ethics follow from that.