

Maximum pleasure as absence of all pain: a philosophical question concerning neuroscientific and Epicurean outlook toward the feeling of pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2024 at 10:00 AM

Shahab also I think your question about the types of hormones raises another aspect that Epicurus would also expect us to understand:

if we were to consider that one of those hormones were associated with (for example) "sexual pleasure," and if we were to consider a situation where the patient were experiencing sexual pleasure, we would not expect "the height of sexual pleasure" to be the same as "the height of pleasure in general."

Even in conventional terms there are many different types of sensory stimulation pleasures, from foods to smells to sights, etc.. The "height of eating pleasure" would not be the same as the "height of olfactory pleasure." I don't think Epicurus or any fair-minded person would consider those experiences to be the same.

Epicurus' terminology takes this a step further and includes within "pleasure" all the other non-stimulative conditions of life, so the issue is even more important in evaluating what Epicurus says.

Just like the "height of pleasure" can't reasonably be identified with just sex, or just food, or just smells, it also can't be identified as "just healthy living" either. The commonality of these experiences is that they are agreeable to us and not painful, not that they feel exactly the same to us. Maybe they have similar biological conduits and maybe they don't, but philosophically in communicating ideas the thing that brings them under the same label for us is that they feel agreeable.

So if we avoid thinking of "the height of pleasure" as meaning 'the height of some particular pleasure' but rather think of it as "the height of experiencing pleasures of any type whatsoever" then I think we are more clear and logically consistent.

So I would say that when the Epicureans talked about the "height of pleasure" they really meant to be understood as referring to "height" in terms of "limit" in the sense of "completeness" or "purity," in that there is no mixture of pain and no further pain to be removed. To me that is why [PD03](#) refers to the "limit of quantity of pleasure." "Height" doesn't necessarily imply "intensity" alone any more than it implies "length of time" or "location of the body." And it shouldn't be read to refer only to "appreciating being alive" any more than it would only refer to "sexual pleasure" or "olfactory pleasure."

So i would say that the height of pleasure when used as a standalone term should understood to refer to any types of pleasure, with no judgment implied as to what types of pleasure are included. The only thing being emphasized in "height of pleasure" is that whatever types of pleasures are present in your vessel, there is no pain mixed in among them.