

Discussion of New Substack Article: "A Gate To Be Burst: Absence of Pain"

Post by "Cassius" of February 12, 2024 at 12:13 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I would like to propose that by thinking through the idea that "the highest pleasure is the absence of pain" will provide some insight into the sense of discontent that is at play in this situation and provide an opportunity to develop contentment rather than be driven by compulsion.

If that works for you I would say more power to you.

As for me, I see hypotheticals like that, no matter how intricate they are made, as all boiling down to questions that are solved by looking to [VS71](#) and following this guidance: *"Every desire must be confronted by this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished, and what if it is not?"*

As far as "absence of pain" goes, for me that's mainly a statement that expands the definition of pleasure and tells me that the best I can hope for in life is as much pleasure accompanied by as little pain as possible. The pleasure that comes from eating chocolate is not necessarily more or less pleasurable than the extra time I might have laying in bed staring at the ceiling at the nursing home if I keep my blood sugar under control for a longer period. That may be an extreme example but to state it more neutrally, the pleasure of health that comes from eating low-carb/keto is not necessarily greater than the pleasure that comes from eating a more sugary diet.

Posing stark examples helps make the questions more clear. Is it necessarily so that living a longer number of years (which might occur if you eat a lean and hungry diet) always and for everyone better than living a shorter life while eating the "standard American diet"? Yes it's better in terms of the physical health of the body, if that is your **only** measure of "better," but I don't think anyone can persuasively maintain that Epicurus would say (or we should think) that the "health of the body" is the only thing in play. Would or should **everyone** choose to eat a "cave-man" diet in order to live a longer number of days?

I always turn back to the letter to Menoeceus for what I think is most persuasive on that point:

[126] But the many at one moment shun death as the greatest of evils, at another (yearn for it) as a respite from the (evils) in life. (But the wise man neither seeks to escape life) nor fears the cessation of life, for neither does life offend him nor does the absence of life seem to be any evil. And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather

the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant.

So yes I think that "absence of pain" is the key to a proper understanding of the full nature of pleasure, so that we understand that sensory stimulation is not all that we live for. But the expanded definition of pleasure still does not tell anyone which particular pleasures to pursue in life, so we have to decide what is our own best mix of mental and bodily experiences, based on what we find to be "most pleasant." And I don't think there is a universal right and wrong answer to the question of "what" is most pleasant, as that is something each person feels uniquely for himself.