

Is All Desire Painful? How Would Epicurus Answer?

Post by "Don" of May 10, 2025 at 7:26 AM

Thanks for the reply.

My first reaction to your post is that whether it's concepts or precepts in translation, the word there in 33 is prolepsis, so we're back to the discussion of what the canonic faculty of what prolepsis is.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

it is also valid and important to abstract into the single word "pleasure" all possible examples of pleasurable feelings so that we can discuss pleasure conceptually and understand that it is "Pleasure" and not divine will or ideal forms that constitutes the highest good.

See, that's where I'm not understanding where our disagreement lies. I agree that the single word pleasure encompasses all possible pleasurable feelings.

The words of Epicurus in his work On Choice are : "Peace of mind and freedom from pain are pleasures which imply a state of rest ; joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity. "

Right there, as an example, is Epicurus including ataraxia, aponia, joy, and delight under the heading of pleasure.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

that it is "Pleasure" ... that constitutes the highest good.

We can capitalize the word to make it appear more "conceptual" but they couldn't do that in the ancient world. It was all capital letters when Epicurus was writing. But he also explicitly says:

U67. I do not think I could conceive of the good (τάγαθὸν tagathon) without the joys of taste, of sex, of hearing, and without the pleasing motions caused by the sight of bodies and forms.

The word there is tagathon "the highest good." Here's including all those physical pleasurable feelings/activities within the definition of the supreme good.

The last point for now from me is that preconceptions (prolepsis) is a distinct leg of the canon apart from the feelings of pleasure and pain. I agree we have to have words to describe the

myriad pleasurable and painful feelings, and words have to have a referent in the physical or mental world. For me, when it comes to naming feelings, we feel the feeling then try to name it. That's one reason there are so many shades and intensities of pleasure and pain. Similarly but distinctly, we sense a pattern in the world through the proleptic faculty and call it justice or a cow or a tower.

This is a conversation that would work better as an actual conversation, but I remain engaged in the discussion.