

Perspectives On "Proving" That Pleasure is "The Good"

Post by "DistantLaughter" of July 15, 2025 at 5:37 AM

Sharon Street's critique in "*Nothing 'Really' Matters, but That's Not What Matters*" is not merely directed at the attempt to prove that **pleasure** is the good, but at any metaethical framework that assumes **real normativity must be grounded in a metaphysically independent, attitude-transcendent realm**. This assumption—central to Derek Parfit's non-naturalist realism—is, for Street, both conceptually misguided and unnecessary for meaningful ethical thought. From her constructivist standpoint, what matters is not what's true from nowhere, but what withstands scrutiny **from within** our own reflective evaluative outlook.

This is where her thought strikingly converges with the **Epicurean rejection of cosmic teleology**. Like Street, Epicurus denies the existence of any divine or supernatural moral order that human beings must detect or conform to. Epicurean physics, with its insistence on atomism and the absence of providential design, closes the door on moral realism of the theistic or Platonic kind. What replaces it is a focus on **our faculties**—*aisthēsis* (sensation), *pathē* (feeling), and *prolepsis* (preconception)—and the recognition that **our criteria for truth and value lie within us**, not in some cosmic blueprint. In both systems, normativity is **human-centered and constructed**, not discovered in a realm beyond.

Street's analogy—that we are not using a "cosmic truth detector" but are instead building a framework of what matters to us—is deeply consonant with the Epicurean "canon of truth." Epicurus's emphasis on sensation, feeling, and preconception as the criteria for knowledge is not an attempt to uncover eternal, mind-independent truths, but a method for navigating **the world as it appears to us**, in ways that are grounded in human nature and conducive to our flourishing. For both thinkers, the idea of some moral truth existing independently of what humans actually care about is not just superfluous—it is a misunderstanding of what it means for something to **matter** at all.