

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Godfrey" of June 22, 2020 at 7:15 PM

ADMIN EDIT: Gosling & Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure" is a very important work, but it is difficult to find in a library. Look around for it and message us if you can't find it.

"The Greeks on Pleasure" is a detailed exposition of the development of Greek philosophic views on pleasure. The entire book is valuable, but the chapters on Epicurus are particularly good, and they provide an exhaustive discussion of the textual reasons why the conventional modern view that Epicurus focused on "absence of pain" as the goal of life is incorrect. These chapters were the inspiration for [Boris Nikolsky's "Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) which further extends the argument by showing that the "katastematic - kinetic" distinction which is so emphasized by modern commentators was probably **not** of significance to Epicurus and the original Epicurean leaders and was probably **not** an Epicurean teaching at all. Additional support for that argument can be found in [Wenham - On Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure in Epicurus](#).

The remainder of this thread is a merge of three separate threads originally started by Godfrey in February of 2020.

This book is pretty academic. As I am extremely non-academic, this post consists only of quotes and/or paraphrases of portions of the book. These are merely notes of things that I found interesting and not at all an outline or summary of the book.

In the book, the authors number practically every paragraph (i.e. 1.0.1), and I have included these numbers for reference as to where my notes came from more specifically. This posting is mainly intended for reference (not to discourage discussion, however, as anyone feels the desire) future part(s) will deal with Epicurus and should be more interesting for discussion.

Chapter 1: The Background

Two approaches, didactic and physiological

1.1 **Didactic approach:** manly, effortful virtue/excellence as opposed to effeminate easy pleasures

1.1.3 Demetrius of Phaleron: pleasure is transitory as opposed to virtue

1.1.5 Solon: avoid pleasures which bring distress

1.1.5 Prodicus's story of Heracles: 1) the conventionally virtuous life is pleasanter than the life of luxury and 2) the best way to show that the virtuous life to be desirable is to show that it is pleasanter.

1.1.6 What is valuable is not short term pleasures but the long term pleasantness of one's life.

1.1.7 By the early 4th century BCE, didactic thinking has some elements of hedonism although these were subservient to virtue ethics.

1.2 Physiological approach

1.2.1 Empedocles (494-c434 BCE), Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia, as described by Theophrastus, consider pleasure and pain as kinds of perception.

1.2.6 Empedocles, pleasure results from filling a deficiency. (Note to [Cassius](#) , [Martin](#) and [Charles](#) : in the 6/20 Skype call I confused Eudoxus with Empedocles... did I mention that I'm not an academic?)

1.2.6 Theophrastus: "Empedocles says that desires arise in living things from their deficiencies in the elements which make each other complete, and pleasures from what is appropriate, according to the mixtures of things which are like and of like natures, and pains and sufferings from what is inappropriate." In other words desires and pleasure and pain relate to keeping the four elements in proper balance.

1.2.6 The urge toward pleasure is the natural instinct of the organism to seek its own best state.

Chapter 2: Evaluative Theories

2.1.3 Democritus had an ethical theory and pleasure was a central feature of it.

2.1.4 Democritus's ethics had a test of conduct. That test was based on the ultimate aim of life, and whether an action aided or hindered achieving that aim. The ultimate aim was a state of well-being. His first innovation was that well-being is a state of mind and independent of externals or possessions. He called this *euthumia* (gladness, joy, having one's emotional and appetitive self, "*thumos*," in a good state), not *eudaimonia*. Secondly, he gave *euthumia* a specific definition: "...the end is *euthumia*, which is not the same as pleasure... but is that state in which the soul remains in calm and stability, not shaken by any fear or superstition or any other emotion." So he saw the aim of life as a state of tranquility rather than a life of pleasure as commonly recognized.

2.1.4 The term *ataraxia* (freedom from disturbance) was not in common use before Epicurus. It was the standard Epicurean term for the ideal state of the soul.

2.1.4 Democritus saw the aim of life as tranquility, not what is generally recognized as a life of pleasure. But he may have considered a life of tranquility as the pleasantest life.

2.1.5 *Euthumia* consists in the distinction and discrimination of pleasures, the finest and most beneficial thing for men per Democritus.

2.1.5 Pleasure isn't considered the pleasure of the moment but the long term pleasure of one's life.

2.1.8 Per Democritus, all men have the same good, *euthumia*, and a life of moderation was required to achieve it.

2.3.1 Aristippus is considered the champion of the sybaritic life (sensuous, self-indulgent) and the founder of the Cyrenaic school.

2.3.3 Cyrenaics were radical hedonists, taking the pleasure of the moment to be more important than the pleasantest life. Bodily pleasures were most important, but no pleasure was pleasanter than any other. All living things pursue pleasure and shun pain. All we have available to us is the present moment, which is why the pleasure of the moment is the most important.

2.3.4 Notes sybaritic hedonism v rational long term hedonism.

(The authors now embark on almost 300 pages devoted to Plato and Aristotle. For me, this wasn't very fruitful reading so I skimmed and skipped over most of it. Apologies to anyone interested in these two; perhaps somebody else could post on these chapters. Following are my sparse notes from that portion.)

Chapter 3: Protagorus

3.1.1 Pleasure is confined to the concluding pages of Protagorus.

3.2.12 Socrates probable view is that the good equals long term pleasantness. This comprises three theses: 1) Long term pleasantness is the only thing that everyone ultimately aims at, 2) long term pleasantness is the only thing ultimately worth having, and 3) what makes the things we call "goods" worth having is their contribution to a life in which pleasure predominates over distress.

Chapter 4: Gorgias

4.1.1 Callicles in the Gorgias would rather have a life of continual recurrence of unsatisfied desire, as this would allow him repeated opportunities for replenishment, i.e. pleasure.

Chapter 5: Phaedo

5.1.1 In the Phaedo, Plato separates the body and the soul and begins to develop the purpose of life as development of the immortal soul. In this conception the pleasures of the body are a nasty diversion from the work of the soul.

Chapter 6: *Republic*

6.8.8 Plato in the *Republic* is unaware of the distinction between the process of replenishment and the end state of repletion when considering pleasure to be the fulfillment of a lack. Pleasure as produced by becoming v being.

Chapter 8: Between *Republic* and *Philebus*

8.3.1 Eudoxus of Cnidus (via Aristotle): pleasure is the good because:

- all animals, including men, pursue it, and what all pursue is the good
- all animals and men avoid pain as an evil, and what is opposite of an evil, pleasure, must be good
- pleasure is never for the sake of something else: no one ever asks "why enjoy yourself?"
- if pleasure is added to anything it makes it better.

(Note to [Cassius](#) , [Martin](#) and [Charles](#) : here's Eudoxus.)

Chapter 11: Aristotle: the Contrast of Treatments

11.3.10 Aristotle is saying that to enjoy something is to bring a *telos* to the doing: to do it to the full.

Chapter 13: Pleasure: Formal or Final Cause

13.2.4 *Telos* is not a decisively purpose word like goal, but it equally means completion or perfection. Aristotle often uses it as actualization of natural potential.

(From here I'll skip to chapter 18, which begins the treatment of Epicurus. I'll start a new thread for that.)

Post by "Don" of June 22, 2020 at 10:47 PM

Quote

2.3.3 Cyrenaics were radical hedonists, taking the pleasure of the moment to be more important than the pleasantest life. Bodily pleasures were most important, but no pleasure was pleasanter than any other. All living things pursue pleasure and shun pain. All we have available to us is the present moment, which is why the pleasure of

the moment is the most important.

This gets at the reason I believe was at the heart of Epicurus's opposition to the Cyrenaics:

My understanding is that Epicurus advocated the most pleasant life, which is why we make our choices and rejections and don't choose every pleasure we encounter. I'll be interested to see if the later chapters address this or point out the fallacy in my understanding.

Thanks for posting this!

Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2020 at 6:59 AM

1 - Thank you Godfrey!

2 - "Cyrenaics were radical hedonists, taking the pleasure of the moment to be more important than the pleasantest life."

I know this is the standard interpretation, and I have no textual evidence to dispute it, but this has always struck me as being something to be cautious about. On its face it seems so short-sighted that I can't imagine an intelligent person advocating it as it superficially appears. It's almost as if - even if this formulation is accurate - they must have had some other additional doctrine that explains why this formulation doesn't really mean exactly what it seems to us. Also, given the opposition that Epicurus encountered even during his own time, one would think that these guys must have encountered the same opposition (or worse) and perhaps we are missing their replies. Add to the what we see in our own time about the pressures to conform to majority viewpoints, and the absolute intensity of force of those who want to beat down any suggestion that "pleasure" can legitimately be

But I say all that not having studied the topic extensively, plus realizing that the texts are probably mostly lost.

Maybe it would be useful to think about how Epicurus might make a point himself that could seem similar. For example:

Maybe even the concept of a "pleasant life" is so much of an abstraction as to be misleading to talk about as a single concept, just like it can be hazardous to talk about a single "greatest good?" Doesn't the letter to Menoeceus itself state that we choose the life not that is longest, but which is most pleasant, so is it not hazardous to consider time to be a controlling element?

Maybe they were arguing that all we really have is "now" so we must include in the "now" all our calculations about the future?

There's no doubt in my mind that Epicurus improved on Cyreniac doctrine, but there's a lot of doubt in my mind about really how bad or inadequate thinkers they were.

Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2020 at 7:21 AM

So I am thinking of this in terms of it being a "winner gets to write the history" problem.

Any advocate of pleasure has a legitimate and important question to answer in deciding how to weigh "time"

into the equation. Is it generally better for pleasure to be longer in time? Probably yes. Is it ALWAYS a requirement or a standard that the longest pleasure is the best pleasure? Probably no.

So the Cyreniacs point out that all we really have is the present, and that it makes sense to prioritize the present.

So Epicurus points out that we most of the time have a reasonable expectation of life over time, so it makes sense to focus on making sure our pleasant pleasures do not create future pain that offsets and "outweighs" our pleasant pleasures.

Both are legitimate positions that have an important role in debating specific logical issues in regard to pleasure, and they do not necessarily conflict with each other.

But because the anti-pleasure zealots won the competition and their textbooks survived, these points are pulled out of context and caricatured to make them appear to be the central thrust of their respective philosophies:

The Cyreniacs are ridiculed for ignoring future consequences of their actions in a way that is easily caricatured as an "eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" position which is probably not an accurate reflection of what they taught.

The Epicureans are ridiculed for taking a "simple pleasures are always better" approach that is easily caricatured as a "better a hundred years as a sheep than a day as a lion" position which is also probably not an accurate reflection of what they taught.

One thing I do assert as true as of my experience in having lived to June, 2020: There is absolutely nothing in world history that should be taken at face value. Virtually everything that is written or discussed "today" has been distorted and misrepresented to serve the interests of the "winners" in the competitions of the "past." So we have to work very hard to drill down if we

are going to uncover the truth about what people in the past really thought, or people in the present really think.

Post by “Don” of June 23, 2020 at 8:37 AM

Since we owe a debt of gratitude to Diogenes Laertius for his Book X, I'll give him his due for saving Aristippus from obscurity. Here's his [Book II, Chapter 8, on Aristippus](#) for those interested in reading about his philosophy.

Post by “Cassius” of June 23, 2020 at 10:42 AM

Comments on The DL Book X:

Aristippus; and for this reason he has made Socrates direct against Aristippus the discourse in which he denounces pleasure.¹ Not but what Theodorus in his work *On Sects* abuses him, and so does Plato in the

1 - Hmm I do not know that I have read that discourse in Xenophon.... Looks to be here: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...1%3Asection%3D1> Edit: Yes I have read it because it leads to this memorable text on "liberty": ["Liberty" - As discussed by Socrates and Aristippus](#)

2 - There is so much "Wit" being reported that there's very little time for the "hard philosophy" - but he does get there in the end.

3 - "They laid down that there are two states, pleasure and pain, the former a smooth, the latter a rough motion, and that pleasure does not differ from pleasure nor is one pleasure more pleasant than another." << It's pretty much my view that this is EXACTLY what Epicurus taught and explains some of the issues about condensing and other aspects of pleasure. Which would have a lot of implications about how we discuss "measuring" pleasure. But still yet I don't think that means there is no difference whatsoever in being pleased with building a rocket to fly to the moon vs eating an ice cream cone.

4 - "However, the bodily pleasure which is the end is, according to Panaetius in his work *On the Sects*, not the

settled pleasure following the removal of pains, or the sort of freedom from discomfort which Epicurus

accepts and maintains to be the end." << I do not and can not accept this as a complete and accurate statement of Epicurean doctrine, so this is an example of questioning how far we should go in accepting DL's view of anything.

5 - They also hold that there is a difference between "end" and "happiness." Our end is particular pleasure, whereas happiness is the sum total of all particular pleasures, in which are included both past and future pleasures." < That sounds to me 100% consistent with Epicurus and consistent with his care as to abstractions in the canon of truth.

6 "Particular pleasure is desirable for its own sake, whereas happiness is desirable not for its own sake but for the sake of particular pleasures." << Probably the same point as 5, profoundly important, and I think Epicurus agreed with it and this is why it is so dangerous to talk about "happiness" as the goal of life.

7 - "Pleasure is good even if it proceed from the most unseemly conduct, as Hippobotus says in his work

On the Sects." << Obviously true and consistent with Epicurus' position.

8 -"The removal of pain, however, which is put forward in Epicurus, seems to them not to be pleasure at all, any more than the absence of pleasure is pain. For both pleasure and pain they hold to consist in motion, whereas absence of pleasure like absence of pain is not motion, since painlessness is the condition of one who is, as it were, asleep." << I think this is another example of DL misinterpreting Epicurus and pulling a logical argument out of context. I think that in fact this is a correct statement of the general rule as understood by normal people, and that Epicurus in fact agreed with it. The issue is that Epicurus was willing to dive into the logical arguments of Plato et al and deal with them by means of other logical arguments, which logical arguments are by nature limited to their context and cannot be lifted from that context without misunderstanding them. In fact DL has already reported that the Cyreniacs held that "They laid down that there are two states, pleasure and pain, the former a smooth, the latter a rough motion..." Does that not compel the logical conclusion embraced by Epicurus, which is helpful in dealing with logical arguments against pleasure being the ultimate guide? In fact, since the Cyreniacs held that there are only two states of feeling, I bet Aristippus did the same thing if we had his full writings, and not just his quips. It may be that Aristippus had less patience with diving into the Platonic word games than had Epicurus, or just that it appears that way due to the texts that survive to us.

Wow there is lots more and I am out of time for now.

Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2020 at 11:47 AM

More comments:

9- "He laid down as the end the smooth motion resulting in sensation."

This is such a brief statement and I have to question whether there are subtleties that don't come through:

1. So "the end" is what is being discussed? Is this the same as the "highest good" or what Torquatus describes in "On Ends" as "We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else."
2. If so, where is the word "pleasure" in this formulation?
3. Why the word "sensation" rather than pleasure?
4. Is this a statement that pleasure IS a sensation, specifically the sensation of smooth motion?
5. Is this a way of getting around the problem of defining what specific pleasure is being discussed, which is a stumbling block in so many ways (ie, when people here "pleasure" they seem to immediately think of particular pleasures rather than the abstraction of "the feeling of pleasure" or "pleasure.")

10 - I come back to this passage as having profound implications: "They also hold that there is a difference between "end" and "happiness." Our end is particular pleasure, whereas happiness is the sum total of all particular pleasures, in which are included both past and future pleasures."

11 - "Nor again do they admit that pleasure is derived from the memory or expectation of good, which was a doctrine of Epicurus. For they assert that the movement affecting the mind is exhausted in course of time." <<< Seems clear to me that there is more going on here than meets the eye!

12 - "Hence, although pleasure is in itself desirable, yet they hold that the things which are productive of certain

pleasures are often of a painful nature, the very opposite of pleasure; so that to accumulate the pleasures which are productive of happiness appears to them a most irksome business." << This seems to me like an uncharitable characterization. I also question the "of a painful nature" - A thing having a "nature" of pleasure?

13 - "They affirm that mental affections can be known, but not the objects from which they come; and

they abandoned the study of nature because of its apparent uncertainty, but fastened on logical inquiries because of their utility." <<< What do we know about the Cyreniacs and atomism? Were they essentially Platonists in physics? If so then that has huge implications.

14 -- "Further that the wiseman really exists." << This has got to be an example of something that was referring to an existing argument which makes no sense without the context.

15 - "They also disallow the claims of the senses, because they do not lead to accurate knowledge. Whatever appears rational should be done." << This does not sound promising at all.

Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2020 at 11:49 AM

[Note: this would probably be a good thread to let grow long and detailed, rather than splitting out the details such as our discussion on the Cyreniacs. The book is devoted to them all, so we can raise initial discussions about the chapters here, and then branch off to different threads or forums later as needed. This thread / book is probably the most comprehensive treatment of the whole subject of pleasure so this thread can be a long one.]

Post by "Charles" of June 23, 2020 at 1:14 PM

Saving this thread for later, as the Cyrenaic line of thinking only survived three heirs: Aristippus, Arete, and Aristippus (the Younger).

It's important to understand their profound influence on Epicurus.

I'll respond in a bit. A little busy right now.

Post by "Charles" of June 23, 2020 at 3:03 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

1.2.1 Empedocles (494-c434 BCE), Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia, as described by Theophrastus, consider pleasure and pain as kinds of perception.

Quote

Among the early philosophers, says Diocles, his favourite was Anaxagoras, although he occasionally disagreed with him, and Archelaus the teacher of Socrates. Diocles adds that he used to train his friends in committing his treatises to memory. - Book 10, Epicurus

I think it's worth mentioning that according to DL, Anaxagoras and his pupil Archelaus were of particular favorites, or regarded with much sympathy by Epicurus. It's also interesting that Anaxagoras lived in Lampsacus for quite some time, though DL cites Favorinus via Metrodorus of Lampsacus, he is referring to Metrodorus the Elder, and not the friend and disciple of Epicurus. But his influence on the town may be the reason why Epicurus, when teaching and amassing a circle of friends in Lampsacus, was able to understand the former's philosophy.

Of course that section in Book 10, we may have to take it with a tiny grain of salt, as DL is citing Diocles of Magnesia, who wrote a biography of philosophers much like Laertius, yet nothing about him is known besides his work as a writer. Though Book 10 is not the only time where DL cites him, instead he cites him quite heavily in virtually every book regarding the Cynics and Stoics, barring a few.

Post by "Godfrey" of June 23, 2020 at 3:31 PM

Quote

Maybe even the concept of a "pleasant life" is so much of an abstraction as to be misleading to talk about as a single concept, just like it can be hazardous to talk about a single "greatest good?"

Quote

Is this the same as the "highest good" or what Torquatus describes in "On Ends" as "We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else."

The first quote brings up an excellent point as to the "greatest good" being an abstraction. It reminds me of an ongoing debate back in architectural school.... El Lissitsky wrote in Russia: An

Architecture for World Revolution that the square is the basic element of all design. A friend and I started pushing the idea for fun, and people were arguing over it for months. Just as each design has its own basis, so does each life.

Part of the genius of Epicurus is that he incorporated pleasure into the Canon and thereby made it a criterion rather than an abstraction.

Post by “Cassius” of June 23, 2020 at 3:33 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

that he incorporated pleasure into the Canon and thereby made it a criterion rather than an abstraction.

Not only incorporated it, but by doing so gave it an elevated position that most people think should be occupied to "logic" and that seems to be only slightly less irritating to the academics than dethroning "god" is to the religionists!

Post by “Don” of June 23, 2020 at 10:08 PM

Here are some of my initial thoughts on the Aristippus chapter.

"[Aristippus] derived pleasure from what was present, and did not toil to procure the enjoyment of something not present"

This would appear to contrast with Epicurus's teaching that we don't choose every pleasure that presents itself but weigh it against possible resulting pains.

To me, the following seems to be showing the Cyrenaics' "end/telos" being contrasted with the Epicureans' "happiness/eudaimonia" so I disagree with [Cassius](#) on the interpretation here:

II.86-87 "They [the Cyrenaics] laid down that there are two states, pleasure and pain, the former a smooth, the latter a rough motion, and that pleasure does not differ from pain nor is one pleasure more pleasant than another. The one state is agreeable and the other repellent to all living things. [NOTE: Epicurus seems to agree with this latter part.] However, the bodily pleasure which is the end is... not

the settled pleasure [καταστηματικὴν ἡδονὴν *katastēmatkēn hēdonēn*, the infamous "katastematic pleasure"] following the removal of pains, or the sort of freedom from discomfort which Epicurus accepts and maintains to be the end. They [Cyrenaics] also hold that there is a difference between "end" and "happiness." [τέλος and εὐδαιμονίας "telos, eudaimonia" in the original] Our [i.e., the Cyrenaics? as if quoting one of their works?] end is particular pleasure, whereas [the Epicureans'] happiness is the sum total of all particular pleasures, in which are included both past and future pleasures. [88] Particular pleasure is desirable for its own sake, whereas happiness is desirable not for its own sake but for the sake of particular pleasures."

The mention of "past and future pleasures" makes me think that the Epicureans are the ones being said to concern themselves with "happiness / eudaimonia" and the Cyrenaics are the ones concerned with "particular pleasure" at least as far as the Cyrenaics themselves are concerned. From this, it appears to me that the Cyrenaics are saying (via DL) that the Epicureans are concerned with "the sum total of all particular pleasures."

It seems to me that what the Cyrenaics are saying is that what is important is to have every pleasure as it comes, in the moment, then they're contrasting that (via DL) with the Epicureans' "eudaimonia/happiness" which is assessed on sum of sequential pleasures experienced throughout a pleasant life.

Which follows on to the next section:

"Nor again do they admit that pleasure is derived from the memory or expectation of good, which was a doctrine of Epicurus."

So, the Cyrenaics only recognized pleasures of motion experienced in the present. Pleasures in the past don't seem to have mattered: they're done! Pleasures in the future didn't matter: they're not being experienced! Epicurus took the step to recognize that the memory of pleasures past was itself pleasurable and thinking of upcoming pleasures was pleasurable as well.

Which gets at another of the Cyrenaics' objections to Epicurus:

"[89] The removal of pain, however, which is put forward in Epicurus, seems to them not to be pleasure at all, any more than the absence of pleasure is pain."

So, according to Cyrenaics, Epicureans don't recognize an intermediate state: neither pleasure nor pain. It's either one or the other. Which seems to me why Epicurus needed to recognize mental pleasure as pleasure in contrast to the Cyrenaics who say there *must* be motion involved, smooth motion = pleasure; rough motion = pain, and **"they hold that pleasure is not derived from sight or from hearing alone."**

I'm not sure this passage is saying they did not enjoy the "most irksome business" of making choices and rejections of pleasures or if it says it was just difficult to decide what pleasures to

indulge in:

"For these reasons they paid more attention to the body than to the mind. Hence, although pleasure is in itself desirable, yet they hold that the things which are productive of certain pleasures are often of a painful nature, the very opposite of pleasure; so that to accumulate the pleasures which are productive of happiness appears to them a most irksome business."

There's more to say here, but I'll stop there for now.

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2020 at 6:34 AM

The more I read this Aristippus material, and our discussion of it, the more concerned I am about relying on the face value of Diogenes Laertius' interpretations.

Even if we are not seeing the result of DL forcing things into anachronistic / stoic-influenced boxes, as per the criticism in the Nikolosky article, to which they do not belong, I think there is a worse problem.

The fact that both the Cyreniacs and Epicurus identified pleasure rather than wisdom or virtue or holiness as the goal of life is the real point of overwhelming significance. It is the elephant in the room against which all other details fade almost into insignificance.

While the additional details are interesting for us to know, they should not be allowed to take our eye off the main focus and things that ought to always be the main focus. For example, what did the Cyreniacs hold about:

1 = is there an afterlife?

2 = is there a supernatural creator / ruler?

3 = is there an absolute virtue?

4 = what did they teach about the senses and the nature of "truth" and "knowledge" and platonic forms or essences?

5 = is the universe infinite and eternal, is the earth at the center of it, is there life elsewhere including higher beings?

Yes the goal of pleasure would be right up there near the top of this list, and the answers to some of these may exist still, but the answers to these questions will have at least as much practical impact on general view of life and ways to pursue pleasure as will issues such as

whether memories are pleasurable.

Of course this is "the Greeks on Pleasure" so the focus is naturally on pleasure, but its still necessary to keep perspective and realize that anyone who dethrones virtue and reason and religion as the goal of life and replaces them with pleasure is already choosing for themselves probably the most critically important marker.

Post by "Don" of June 24, 2020 at 7:21 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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... but the answers to these questions will have at least as much practical impact on general view of life and ways to pursue pleasure as will issues such as whether memories are pleasurable.

Display More

I think I see where [Cassius](#) is coming from, but I have almost the opposite reaction to Aristippus's chapter in DL.

I've always found it interesting that DL ends his entire work with Epicurus's [Principal Doctrines](#). He even writes:

Quote

Come, then, let me set the seal, so to say, on my entire work as well as on this philosopher's life by citing his *Sovran Maxims*, therewith bringing the whole work to a close and making the end of it to coincide with the beginning of happiness.

which suggests to me that DL was either positively inclined toward Epicurus or was at least not hostile. My impression had always been that DL is basically a compiler, pulling in anecdotes that interest him from disparate sources with an editorial sentiment similar to Herodotus (the historian, not the recipient of Epicurus's letter) with a "some people say this, others say that..." way of reporting his findings. Overall, I don't see a Stoic/Platonic bias. I admit I need to be read more DL chapters, so please feel free to point me to passages that reflect that if I miss them.

The other thing I think is interesting about the Aristippus chapter (Note: DL gives Epicurus a whole *book*) is that it compares and contrasts two philosophies giving paramount importance to pleasure. Seeing how Aristippus prioritizes pleasure gives us a window into what Epicurus was up against when he was formulating his own philosophy. What did he agree with Aristippus about? What did he disagree? I think this is important to understand how pleasure fits into each of their worldviews. Maybe some of us are actually Cyrenaics? Maybe seeing Aristippus's perspective strengthens our commitment to Epicurus's novel approach (at the time) in seeing memories as part of pleasure?

The five details that [Cassius](#) lays out are important, but I think understanding what role pleasure had in each of these two philosophies is even more important. This was an argument taking place at the founding of the philosophy of life we purport to follow. Knowing how that philosophy came to be - and how its tenets were formed - is the most important thing in my opinion. DL provides a window - ever so slightly open - into that foundation and history.

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2020 at 7:49 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

which suggests to me that DL was either positively inclined toward Epicurus or was at least not hostile

Right - I agree with that -- but positively inclined in a way that for example James Warren might be -- because he sees Epicurus through a lens of post and non-Epicurean thought, as perhaps the best of the group, but part of the group, and not as a revolutionary against the group.

[Quote from Don](#)

My impression had always been that DL is basically a compiler, pulling in anecdotes that interest him from disparate source

Right I agree with that too, but compiling by means of a framework of analysis that is not Epicurean, and therefore tends to distort what he is reporting. Again I point to the [Nikolsky](#) analysis of the "Division of Carneades" which appears to influence the active/static analysis. This isn't something that we would be free from ourselves - we have our sensitivities and our training today and we too look for things that we think ourselves to be most important, and tend to analyze that way. It's a natural issue.

I don't really disagree with most of the last paragraph either, except that I think in my own situation the answers to the questions I listed are of the most extreme practical importance to how to apply pleasure. If there is an afterlife, if there is a supernatural god, if there is absolute virtue, etc, then the game of pleasure **totally** changes. We would then look to those other factors to determine how we should evaluate and pursue pleasure, and probably reach totally different conclusions than we would under and Epicurean framework.

Post by “Don” of June 24, 2020 at 8:37 AM

I need to go back and re-read that [Nikolsky](#) article, but I agree with your point that compilers decide what to compile. To paraphrase what you mentioned previously, the winners write the history and the compilers decide what to collect.

And I think I see your perspective on those last points. So then which comes first: The realization that pleasure is worthy of pursuit? Or the realization that there's no afterlife and it's acceptable to then pursue pleasure in the here and now? Or do they arise together? Or do we build each up as on the "Canon, Physics, Ethics" tripod? If this, then that. This isn't a criticism of your points. I'm just working through how we arrive at answers to those questions you posed. This is why I think it's important to see Epicurus's context and thought process in opposing the Cyrenaics and what they disagreed with in his philosophy. How did we get where we are?

Your thoughtful replies and posts are always appreciated! It definitely helps me hone my own thinking!

Post by “Cassius” of June 24, 2020 at 8:55 AM

Those are great points and questions Don.

You know what explains and motivates some of my most recent thinking, and these comments?

I always seem to come back in my mind to the concern that I think Epicurus intended his philosophy for pretty much EVERYONE who has any brainpower whatsoever. I think it's inherent in the "outline" model that he referred to explicitly that we ought to concentrate most of our time and effort on the "big picture" items that are the most significant to us as real people living real lives, and that we aren't just "academics" pursuing knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

That means that I think it's kind of a trap - a type that Cicero and other anti-Epicurean philosophers intentionally laid and set - for us to be so fascinated by the details that we fail to accept and apply the immediate issues of most profound significance. I enjoy it as much as anybody else, but so long as we act like we are college students in an advanced philosophy class, the human world spins by outside the windows in total unawareness or even hostility toward what we are discussing inside. And we miss the experiences and the accomplishments that we ought to achieve were we fully engaged in the world.

Maybe I think that this is one of the real purposes of the academic viewpoint that wisdom or scholarship itself is the highest kind of life. Maybe I think that we're in a matrix of the sort that Marx accused religion of being - the "opiate of the people." Maybe the endless debates over word structures and points that are of less significance, and which are almost impossible to resolve, is the "opiate of the educated" which keeps US in our box and away from full engagement with the world.

So I always come back in the end to the idea that we should be asking "what are the most important points?" and "how do we convey these to other people who should be our friends?" and "how do we therefore begin again what the ancient Epicureans were in the process of doing before their world was overwhelmed with totalitarian monotheist religion?"

I think that discussing and debating the details that we are doing now is a critical part of the process, so we can in fact understand how to describe the major outline. But unless we find the time and the energy and the organization to do both at the same time, we're still trapped in that Platonic cave because we're not translating our findings into action. It's as if we are so mesmerized by "knowledge" or "science" - which are themselves "unlimited" and can never be fully achieved in a human lifetime, that we forget the fundamental point that we have to use our limited lifespans as productively as possible.

I suspect both the ancient Epicureans and the Cyreniacs would agree on that point, and that they would tell us something like:

"Look at the world around you! PUT ASIDE the details such as whether memories are pleasant for the time being. Your life is short, you are surrounded by people who are actively working to

suppress you and your friends and your views of the universe and the true end of life. How do you expect to live pleasantly if you don't accept that reality and form a plan to deal with it? Just don't sit around thinking and debating about details - ACT on the main points -- like we did!"

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2020 at 8:59 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

And I think I see your perspective on those last points. So then which comes first: The realization that pleasure is worthy of pursuit? Or the realization that there's no afterlife and it's acceptable to then pursue pleasure in the here and now? Or do they arise together? Or do we build each up as on the "Canon, Physics, Ethics" tripod? If this, then that. This isn't a criticism of your points. I'm just working through how we arrive at answers to those questions you posed. This is why I think it's important to see Epicurus's context and thought process in opposing the Cyrenaics and what they disagreed with in his philosophy. How did we get where we are?

To address this specifically I would say this:

I don't think that we can understand the nature of pleasure without first having a basic understanding that the universe is natural and not supernatural, and I don't think we can understand that without a basic framework of knowledge in which we accept that it is correct to have confidence in certain conclusions, even though we will never have all of the detailed evidence we would like to have. Both of those concerns can be addressed with some basic Epicurean arguments as to the physics and to the senses and the role of reason. Once you are then clear that there is no possibility of a supernatural god or an absolute virtue, then it becomes clear that feeling (pleasure) is the appropriate guide of life. I think they all go hand in hand, with the best approach being what I gather Epicurus held about being clear and being quick to make the important points at first (rather than hiding the point like Socrates). Then the details are expanded in outline form to the extent that the individual person has time and inclination to pursue them.

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2020 at 9:05 AM

Also as to method I think we have to acknowledge that not every person in every situation is a good prospect for becoming an Epicurean. They could be and should be, if started early enough, but at some point the thought patterns become so entrenched that there's just no going back and rebuilding at the appropriate ground level.

So that means that I think we spin our wheels uselessly when we focus all our time on "Academic" types who have already spend much of their lives pursuing other paths. No doubt some of them are open to rethinking things, but the issues we address are so emotional that of the academic class, if they haven't already gotten to the point where they realize the value of the Epicurean perspective (even if they don't realize that it is Epicurean) then they probably are not going to be able to do anything other than resist it since it conflicts so strongly with their core beliefs.

I know that's a broad brush and there will be many individual exceptions, but I'm saying this from a general "strategy" perspective of how it makes sense for most of us to spend our time.

I know I get a lot more "satisfaction" and "pleasure" in talking to people who are intelligent but new to Epicurus, and who want to take it seriously in their own lives, rather than debating committed Stoics or those of other philosophies who simply want to compare relatively obscure details without ever being open on the basic issues. That's a significant part of what is frustrating in talking to confirmed Stoics, although NEW stoics, who don't yet realize where Stoicism really leads, are often receptive.

Post by "Cassius" of June 24, 2020 at 11:34 AM

For anyone reading this thread, this is the heart of the Nikoslky argument, which is something he says that he researched after reading through the arguments of Gosling and Taylor. Full article is [here](#).

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the question of the attribution to Epicurus of the classification of pleasures into 'kinetic' and 'static'. This classification, usually regarded as authentic, confronts us with a number of problems and contradictions. Besides, it is only mentioned in a few sources that are not the most reliable. Following Gosling and Taylor, I believe that the authenticity of the classification may be called in question.

The analysis of the ancient evidence concerning Epicurus' concept of pleasure is made according to the following principle: first, I consider the sources that do not mention the distinction between 'kinetic' and 'static' pleasures, and only then do I compare them with the other group of texts which comprises reports by Cicero, Diogenes Laertius and Athenaeus. From the former group of texts there emerges a concept of pleasure as a single and not twofold notion, while such terms as 'motion' and 'state' describe not two different phenomena but only two characteristics of the same phenomenon. On the other hand, the reports comprising the latter group appear to derive from one and the same doxographical tradition, and to be connected with the classification of ethical doctrines put forward by the Middle Academy and known as the *divisio Carneadea*. In conclusion, I argue that the idea of Epicurus' classification of pleasures is based on a misinterpretation of Epicurus' concept in Academic doxography, which tended to contrapose it to doctrines of other schools, above all to the Cyrenaics' views.

Post by "Don" of June 24, 2020 at 5:55 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

For anyone reading this thread, this is the heart of the Nikoslky argument, which is something he says that he researched after reading through the arguments of Gosling and Taylor. Full article is [here](#).

Thank you for posting that link. I thought I had read it, but, if I did, I had forgotten some of his arguments. He raises some strong arguments for his case! I'm convinced, I think, but it definitely calls for a close, attentive reading.

Post by "Don" of June 24, 2020 at 6:41 PM

In reading about the Cyrenaics, it seems to me that PD 10 (and the similar text in the Letter to Menoikos) is a direct rebuke to them.

Quote

If the things which debauched men find pleasurable put an end to all fears... and if they revealed how we ought to limit our desires, we would have no reason to reproach them, for they would be fulfilled with pleasures from every source while experiencing no pain, neither in mind nor body, which is the chief evil of life.

The key word here, to me, has always been **if**. As far as I can see, Aristippus advocated for his followers to experience **every** pleasure. Epicurus agreed that every pleasure is good, but advocated for a selection - choice and avoidance - of pleasures leading to the most pleasant life.

Reading about the Cyrenaics has further convinced me that PD 10 is directly addressing people who would try and lump in the Epicureans with the Cyrenaics just because of their emphasis on pleasure.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 24, 2020 at 7:35 PM

This is a continuation of notes on Gosling and Taylor's *The Greeks on Pleasure*, begun here: <http://www.epicureanfriends.com/index.php?thre...D=8003#post8003>

For the most part these are quotes and/or paraphrases from the book; my comments are italicized and in parentheses. Text in bold is my emphasis. The authors of the book are not Epicureans, theirs is an academic take on Epicurean pleasure, worthy of discussion. There is much more to their discussion of Epicurus than I've been able to include here, but I think I've covered their main points.

Chapter 18: Epicurus

18.1.4 According to Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus used an argument similar to Eudoxus that all living things are pleased with pleasure and are by nature, without recourse to reasoning, hostile to pain, and so we automatically flee the latter.

18.1.4 **Epicurus seems to insist on the fact that the recognition of the value of pleasure is pre-rational. This suggests that he insists on the relation of pleasure to perception. In other words, the experience of pleasure is the experience of its**

goodness. For consistency with his theory of knowledge he must be able to give a perceptual basis for judgments of value if he is to claim that they can be known.

18.1.4 This is sometimes construed as though pleasure was a feeling attached to a perception. But *pathos*, Epicurus' word for pleasure and pain, means a way of being affected; there are two *pathe* that occur with every living thing: pleasure and pain.

18.1.4 There is no midway between pleasure and pain: pleasure is defined as the absence of pain. Not, of course, that any absence of pain (e.g. death) is pleasure, but any painless conscious life is a pleasure. This does not consist simply in being alive, but in living the kind of life characteristic of the species.

18.1.4 Every perception involves either pleasure or pain, and in such perception a sentient being grasps the value or disvalue of being so affected, a grasp that is, at a pre-logical level, constituted by acceptance or aversion. **The bias of this way of thinking will be to make the goodness of each particular pleasure obvious in each perception. There will be no temptation to make the value of pleasure maximization over a life obvious to perception.**

18.1.4 Anyone who makes a judgment of the worth of a life can only do so by reference to its pleasantness, which can only be judged by the perception of those who live it. There is room for argument as to what form of life is pleasantest, but no room at all for discussion as to what makes something good.

18.1.5 Per Epicurus, kinetic pleasures are those which accompany a change from pain to its removal. Static pleasures are those of conditions where pain is absent, and with it any cause of change. Quite generally, pleasures cannot increase in degree beyond the point of removal of pain, only in type.

18.1.5 With bodily pleasures this limit is reached when the need that is causing pain is removed. Mental pain is largely caused by such things as grief and fear and so is only to be removed by reflections on the source of these emotions. See [PD18](#). **Since there is only variation after the point of removal of pain, not increase, there is no need to discuss comparative intensities or measures of comparative pleasantness of different activities.**

18.1.6 Therefore **the problem is to determine if a life of pleasure can be attained and if so, how.** At the bodily level Epicurus held that severe pain is short lived, and long lasting pain generally allows for an excess of pleasure over pain (PD4), so that properly viewed unavoidable pains of illness should not be given much weight. Meeting other bodily needs is a fairly easy matter ([PD15](#), 21).

18.1.6 At the mental level, things are more complicated. Painful emotions are aroused by fear of future evil (pain=evil). These are to a large extent based on false views, either on the nature

of man and the universe or on the nature of pleasure.

18.1.6 A simple life removed from public affairs and bolstered by reflection on the basic facts about the structure of the universe can be relied upon to produce a stable happiness. (???)

18.2.2 Problem: this would suggest that Epicurus attaches no significance to sensual pleasures, which contradicts some of his recorded statements.

18.2.5 Problem: judging pleasures and pains by their effects (as in the letter to Menoeceus) implies that duration is an important factor.

18.3.1 Discussion of VS33 *the voice of the flesh is not to hunger, not to thirst, not to feel cold* as it relates to his statement that no good is conceivable without the pleasures of taste, love, hearing and sight. The latter does not say that these pleasures are either greater or more important than any others, only that Epicurus cannot conceive of the good if these pleasures are removed. It doesn't imply that no others are necessary, or any ranking of pleasures. Pleasures of sight and hearing may be generally unmixed, but the unmixed pleasures of taste and sex are only possible with removal of distress. To Epicurus there are only two *pathe*, pleasure and pain, so to avoid these pleasures (a) in the unmixed case is avoiding an obvious good, and (b) in the other cases is avoiding painless perception which is genuine pleasure, as well as the pleasure of replenishment.

18.3.2 Regarding the comment that all pleasure begins in the stomach, it is the common view of sages that a well-regulated diet is the foundation of a well-regulated life.

18.3.3 Epicurus thought that bodily pleasure (painless sensory pleasure) had a certain primacy and that *ataraxia* is confident expectation and memory of bodily pleasure. So well-based mental pleasure is dependent on bodily pleasure. However this does not make bodily pleasure greater. Further, since anxiety can ruin bodily pleasure, and since *ataraxia* requires bodily pleasure as a general rule, there is a sense in which *ataraxia* constitutes the highest condition of pleasure and is thereby more important.

18.3.4 This is not a proof that this was Epicurus' thinking, but an interpretation which defends against interpretations of inconsistency and therefore a preferred interpretation.

18.3.5-18.3.8 (*This is an extended 3 page discussion of Epicurus vs Aristippus and the Cyrenaics. [Cassius](#) , based on previous posts this might be worth a separate post with a reproduction of the text. For now, I'm skipping to the end of the discussion.*) Duration: the view that a long period of pleasure is better than a short one, and worse for pain, is the most natural and plausible way to understand the calculation of pleasure and seems to be suggested by PD4. But [PD19](#) and [PD20](#) state that an extension of a period of pleasure will not increase it, that it is the body that wants infinite pleasure but the mind knows better. This seems to imply that a wise man will not take the duration of pleasure into account.

18.3.9-18.3.14 (*The discussion of duration now runs for 3 pages; I'm noting the end of the discussion.*) Comparing two pleasures, or two periods of pleasure, is possible only if one is mixed, in which case the unmixed one is pleasanter than the mixed one. Comparison of two unmixed pleasures is only possible if one or both periods of pleasure can be extended to a point where it becomes mixed. But this is to look on lives from the outside. In actual practice, surely the wise man will always be concerned with increasing the proportion of pleasure in his life and reducing the amount of unavoidable pain. It is only in fanciful utopian conditions that he will not be concerned with duration.

18.3.15 **We are so used to the problems of utilitarianism that we are inclined to assume that anything that sounds like a hedonic calculus is meant for day to day use. But this does not seem to be true with Epicurus.** He is not telling us that a wise man must perform daily intricate calculations of the sort *perhaps* envisaged in Plato's Protagoras.

18.3.15 **A wise man needs to know certain basic facts about man and nature, convince himself of them and acquire certain habits of life. These will ensure that pleasure predominates. No daily hedonic calculus is necessary; the calculation is all at the stage of working out the facts, the effects of belief in them, and the proper regimen. From time to time one will have to review one's knowledge and confirm one's attitudes and practices. Once one is convinced of the truth of Epicurus' doctrines and has incorporated his teachings into one's life, one ceases to worry and lives a life as near to *ataraxia* and *aponia* as is possible for one. To achieve the best life possible, conviction and good habits are enough. One's wisdom shows in the acquisition and development of those characteristics that will keep his life as pleasant as it can be, and that being so he will not be deluded into thinking that it will improve if only it lasts a little longer.**

18.3.17 **Living a life free of disturbance is not just a matter of staying alive and not being disturbed, as with a person under heavy sedation, but living the sort of life specific to the being in question. This is vaguely Aristotelean: if one is living according to one's nature then one is enjoying one's life, and failure of enjoyment is a function of disrupted nature. Epicurus is less interested in individual activities and their enjoyment, and more in a condition of the individual which ensures him balance independently of external circumstance.**

18.3.19 ***Ataraxia* consists in a condition of correct belief, and *aponia* in a condition free of bodily lack. Epicurean wisdom, *phronesis*, is more like Aristotelean practical wisdom than Plato's wisdom. The distinction between wisdom and *ataraxia* is therefore verbal rather than real. Since absence of wisdom is equivalent to the absence of *ataraxia* and therefore of mental pleasure, and its presence to the presence of mental pleasure, using it or mental pleasure as a criterion of worth amount to the same thing.**

18.3.20 Normal life is pleasant unless one's constitution is disturbed; one's whole tendency is against disturbance; since pleasure is only reduced by disturbance this means that the organism appreciates as good/best the pleasant/most pleasant, whose worth is recognized in perception. Once one recognizes the nature of the good as given in perception one can see that many beings actually pursue illusory goods. The wise man recognizes that a relatively unmixed life is attainable, and to a large extent achieves it in that recognition; he thereby acquires an indifference to either death or the extension of life and a contentment with what he has.

(The next, and final, thread will cover katastematic and kinetic pleasures and the final chapters of the book.)

Post by "Cassius" of June 25, 2020 at 6:03 AM

" As far as I can see, Aristippus advocated for his followers to experience *every* pleasure"

Do you think so? I have not read the material closely enough to agree or disagree. But on its face that position would seem to be difficult to reconcile with real life, so I wonder if that allegation (that *every* pleasure should be experienced) was true or a slander.

Post by "Cassius" of June 25, 2020 at 6:16 AM

So much in there:

1. Yes the duration issue is of great significance since I think it is natural for us to presume that length is the key or supreme element and it is pretty clear that Epicurus did not hold that. So much implied there that it definitely deserves detailed treatment.
2. "18.1.5 Per Epicurus, kinetic pleasures are those which accompany a change from pain to its removal. Static pleasures are those of conditions where pain is absent, and with it any cause of change. Quite generally, pleasures cannot increase in degree beyond the point of removal of pain, only in type."

This may be a quote and may or may not be true as to Epicurus (I tend to doubt it) but I recall reading somewhere in G & T that the wider view was that any pleasure involving ANY kind of change (not just replenishment) was considered to be kinetic. Perhaps that was from an earlier section but I tend to think that the Epicurean nature of atoms constantly moving means that

nothing is essentially static and so I question whether Epicurus would even have considered "static" to be a legitimate category. I am pretty sure the book contains good material somewhere supporting the view that kinetic implies ANY KIND of change, even moving the focus of the mind from one thought to another, so if someone comes across that reference and can pull it out and highlight it so we can find in the future I would appreciate it.

Perhaps that is in [Nikolsky](#) but I think it is somewhere in G&T.

Post by “Don” of June 25, 2020 at 8:12 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

" As far as I can see, Aristippus advocated for his followers to experience *every* pleasure"

Do you think so? I have not read the material closely enough to agree or disagree. But on its face that position would seem to be difficult to reconcile with real life, so I wonder if that allegation (that *every* pleasure should be experienced) was true or a slander.

Hmm... Maybe I was hasty. I take your point about slander, and the [Nikolsky](#) article opened my eyes to DL's potential shortcomings. I'll reassess and repost... Off to the books 😊

[Edit 1: I found someone online who appears to have [assembled a comprehensive list of Cyrenaic resources and quotations](#). The site could use work but the sources include citations. This could be helpful.]

[Edit 2: In rereading the Cyrenaic mentions in DL X and scrolling through that website mentioned above, it seems one of Epicurus's primary differences with the Cyrenaics was the inclusion of mental pleasures, for lack of a better term right now. From what I'm interpreting, the Cyrenaics only recognized pleasures in doing something in the here and now. Bodily pleasures -- eating, drinking, sex, etc. -- experienced in the present were all we have. It sounds like they didn't accept that recollection of past pleasures or the anticipation of future pleasures counted (again, for lack of a better word). It sounds to me that that is one area where Epicurus could have been contrasting his limits or fulfilment of pleasure (see [Cassius](#) 's leaky vessel graphic) with them. My next project (in addition to completing DeWitt - see how I got that in there 😊) may be going thru the texts and comparing and contrasting what we know if the Cyrenaics and Epicureans. It seems important to me know how these schools differed and how they didn't. I did find it interesting that Aristippus's daughter is the one credited (or maybe blamed according to ancient authors) for having transmitted his teachings to her son, Aristippus

the Younger.

Okay, no more edits on this one.]

Post by “Don” of June 25, 2020 at 10:06 AM

Article of interest:

[Epicureans and Cyrenaics on pleasure as a pathos](#)

Post by “Cassius” of June 25, 2020 at 2:32 PM

Ok great comments and witticisms! 😊

Thanks for the Lucian link. A full mediawiki-based page - very good!

I was hoping you would include the precise sentence about "experiencing everything" as i have not yet had time to look at it. Thinking only about your formulation, and of course purely speculating, I would wonder whether the "experience everything" part might be a reference to what the same idea that Epicurus expressed (through DL) about the wise man FEELING HIS EMOTIONS MORE DEEPLY than others, and this being no hindrance to his wisdom. Surely DL would not have conflated a similar thought into something antagonistic, but at this point I am pretty much committed to the view that most (if not all) of these guys possessed at least normal intelligence, and even if they were disposed to be witty and thus subjecting themselves to the possibility of being misunderstood, if they took a position on something surely it had at least a colorable position in what normal people think of as fact. To totally eliminate mental / emotional enjoyment from pleasure would seem to be so counter intuitive that I question whether that could be true.

Seems to me we have to constantly deal with the ambiguities in words like "bodily" and "mental" given that if we take the Epicurean view that there is no "spiritual" or "divine" realm, then ultimate all the workings of our minds are also "bodily" as well (unless he makes the specific opposite point, which I don't see). Then there's the question of "atoms" or "elements" vs "bodies," and of course Epicurus didn't use the term "emergent property" as best I can tell, so it's hazardous to take a position on these distinctions without a lot of clear evidence. And in the absence of clear evidence indicating a counterintuitive position, I am thinking that it makes sense to interpret everything in a way that a "normal person" would think it would be meant,

unless there's clear evidence otherwise. And is there really clear evidence that Aristippus emphatically held that good memories, or planning for the future, is not pleasurable? (asking that rhetorically, not at you Don).

Post by "Cassius" of June 25, 2020 at 3:10 PM

This is PART, but not all, of what I am remembering. I am remembering that G&T document somewhere how a mental process such as "gladness of mind" is a kinetic pleasure. If "Gladness of mind" is not a static pleasure, then I once again emphatically hold that I hardly can imagine what IS a static pleasure, and I can't imagine how I would have a use for them - much less that they are the "highest good."

It has been too long since I read this article. Very well written, very persuasively argued, in my humble opinion. If I were looking for a pantheon of modern commentators who I would rank

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BORIS NIKOLSKY

be on

least not quite agree with this. Firstly, in one of his utterances quoted by Cicero and Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus states that he cannot think of any other good than pleasures related to gustatory, auditory, visual or sexual sensations,¹⁵ i.e., pleasures which are on the traditional interpretation regarded as kinetic. Secondly, in his letter to Idomeneus written on his death-bed Epicurus stressed that, although the continual pains from strangury and dysentery were so great that nothing could increase them, he set above them all his gladness of mind at the memory of their past conversations;¹⁶ and since the gladness of mind is a kinetic pleasure, which on the usual interpretation it is, then we should have to admit that sometimes a kinetic pleasure can quite well compensate for the absence of a static pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of June 25, 2020 at 3:19 PM

I forgot one unfortunate aspect of the [Nikolsky](#) article - in general, he does not translate his Latin and Greek. At some point I'd like to compile the translations and attach them to our copy to make it easier for people to read.

Post by “Charles” of June 25, 2020 at 3:26 PM

Perhaps we should make a new thread concerning the Cyrenaics, as I have a lot of material and small tidbits of information on them, as they're of huge fascination to me, contrary to popular belief, and perhaps some on this forum. I am inclined to believe that Epicurus took more inspiration and likeness towards the Cyrenaics than is often admitted.

As for the key differences between their approach to pleasure, where the Cyrenaics believed in only the pleasure of the moment whereas Epicurus believed in pleasures recollected and anticipated further and constant pleasure in the long run (not to be confused with time spent). Just as the Epicurean Canon is essential for understanding Epicurean ethics, so too must we understand the epistemology of Aristippus & his most immediate followers.

The first Cyrenaics were "empiric-skeptics", believing with certainty that your senses are accurate to what you are currently experiencing. But they do not regard the state, or properties of what they are sensing, and do not believe that knowledge can extend beyond your current state of sensational feeling. I had a brief conversation with someone on the subject of Cyrenaic pleasures & ataraxia quite a few months ago, and he cited a position taken by a researcher, that this sensation extant in only the moment becomes a verb, so that the experience of seeing yellow becomes "I am being yellowed", or to a more accurate example: "I am being pleased", "I am pleased", etc.

With this in mind, its perfectly clear why the Cyrenaics would deny the possibility of pleasure that could be experienced with the mind, and thus, when the present has not occurred, in essence, a "static" pleasure, since as we have discussed, and made known, pleasure and pain to the first Cyrenaics, only consisted in smooth and rough motions.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 25, 2020 at 5:35 PM

Indeed there is a lot in there! This book is a complicated web of arguments and counter-arguments. I've tried to keep my quotes and paraphrasing accurate and in context but may not

have fully succeeded.

As to 18.1.5, that was my paraphrase. Here is the complete paragraph:

"18.1.5 When it comes to assessing various degrees of pleasantness, Epicurus seems to have thought that pleasures are of two sorts, those of change (kinetic) and those of stable condition (katastematic) and perhaps that either sort could be primarily bodily or mental. (DL X.136, 144). Those associated with motion seem to be those which accompany a change from pain to its removal, whereas those of a stable state are those of conditions where pain is absent, and with it any cause of change (DL X.128-9). Quite generally, pleasures cannot increase in degree beyond the point of removal of pain (PD 3, DL X.139). With bodily pleasures this limit is reached when the need that is causing pain is removed. Mental pain is largely caused by such things as grief and fear, and so is only to be removed by reflections on the sources of these emotions (PD 18, DL X.144). In either case there is no possibility of increase past the point of the removal of pain, only of variation. There is no need, therefore, to get into complexities of comparative intensities or other methods of assessing the comparative pleasantness of different activities. A life free from pain *ipso facto* wins over one not so free."

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I am pretty sure the book contains good material somewhere supporting the view that kinetic implies ANY KIND of change, even moving the focus of the mind from one thought to another, so if someone comes across that reference and can pull it out and highlight it so we can find in the future I would appreciate it.

In chapter 19: [Gosling & Taylor, On Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasure](#)

"19.3.4 It is perhaps worth emphasizing that any view on this subject owes us an account of Epicurus' choice of terminology. On the more traditional view one has to suppose that 'kinetic' is chosen because Epicurus has an account of perception in terms of the movement (*kinesis*) of atoms. The trouble with this is that Epicurus' account of the organism quite generally is in terms of the movements of atoms, so that it is difficult to know what 'katastematic' is referring to. This might tempt one to Merlan's version of the contrast in terms of stable (katastematic) as against passing pleasures. There is no evidence that we can find for this in the original context of Epicurus' writings, though it has to be admitted that perusal of Cicero, and acceptance of his translations, does give some colour to the view. On the other hand, there is evidence in the background to Epicurus for the kind of contrast which we are suggesting, and it fits very well with a view which relieves Epicurus of the awkwardness mentioned earlier in this chapter."

[Cassius](#) Not sure if this is what you were referring to, but it's a start....

Post by "Godfrey" of June 25, 2020 at 5:59 PM

Quote

18.3.15 A wise man needs to know certain basic facts about man and nature, convince himself of them and acquire certain habits of life. These will ensure that pleasure predominates. No daily hedonic calculus is necessary; the calculation is all at the stage of working out the facts, the effects of belief in them, and the proper regimen. From time to time one will have to review one's knowledge and confirm one's attitudes and practices. Once one is convinced of the truth of Epicurus' doctrines and has incorporated his teachings into one's life, one ceases to worry and lives a life as near to ataraxia and aponia as is possible for one. To achieve the best life possible, conviction and good habits are enough. One's wisdom shows in the acquisition and development of those characteristics that will keep his life as pleasant as it can be, and that being so he will not be deluded into thinking that it will improve if only it lasts a little longer.

18.3.17 Living a life free of disturbance is not just a matter of staying alive and not being disturbed, as with a person under heavy sedation, but living the sort of life specific to the being in question. This is vaguely Aristotelean: if one is living according to one's nature then one is enjoying one's life, and failure of enjoyment is a function of disrupted nature. Epicurus is less interested in individual activities and their enjoyment, and more in a condition of the individual which ensures him balance independently of external circumstance.

18.3.19 Ataraxia consists in a condition of correct belief, and aponia in a condition free of bodily lack. Epicurean wisdom, *phronesis*, is more like Aristotelean practical wisdom than Plato's wisdom. The distinction between wisdom and ataraxia is therefore verbal rather than real. Since absence of wisdom is equivalent to the absence of ataraxia and therefore of mental pleasure, and its presence to the presence of mental pleasure, using it or mental pleasure as a criterion of worth amount to the same thing.

This quote is, to me, particularly compelling and also disturbing. It seems to be something of a summation of Epicurean pleasure from G&T's point of view.

The idea that the understanding and acceptance of the philosophy, combined with good habits (presumably these include the pursuit of pleasure!) seems to me to be simply how one lives according to any chosen philosophy. I like that they seem to be attempting to come to a resolution of the "absence of pain" argument which doesn't involve living in a bubble. However the idea that *ataraxia* is basically the same thing as *phronesis* seems to open the door for all sorts of problems, primarily the argument that one should pursue practical wisdom rather than pleasure. However PD 5 is saying largely the same thing to my mind. So is my concern in this regard just a matter of semantics, of trying to define an undefinable abstract good? I fear that in defining pleasure they have removed pleasure from the equation.

Post by “Cassius” of June 25, 2020 at 8:05 PM

At danger of making a point that is too minute to be of general interest, I want to point something out that I think should be incorporated. We rarely spend much time discussing "images" and their impact. The topic of images seems very strange, and as we haven't reached it in the Lucretius podcast yet I haven't re-read Lucretius on it lately. But in re-reading the [Nikolsky](#) article I see how he emphasizes how pleasures of all kinds seem to involve an impact on the living thing (impact from outside) so we should probably keep the involvement of images in mind when we do deep thinking about this topic. I remember the joking between Cicero and Cassius to the effect that some Epicureans seemed to think that "spectres" were factors that influenced ψ to all sorts of things.

Thus by my reasoning it follows that Epicurus might speak of any pleasure both as motion and as the absence of pain; thus, these two concepts by no means refer to two different kinds of pleasure. From my point of view, all the terms that are mentioned above – ἡδονή, κίνησις, ἀπονία, εὐσταθὲς κατάστημα/εὐστάθεια – serve to describe different characteristics of the same phenomenon, which consists in an an impact on the organism of some force bringing it into a natural state, and which in the most general sense is referred to as ἡδονή. The terms ἀπονία and μὴ ἀλγηδών express the most essential, negative characteristic of this phenomenon which makes it possible to set a limit on the magnitude of pleasures. As for the expression λεία καὶ προσηνῆς κίνησις, it defines the physical nature of pleasure – the penetration into the organism of atoms coming from the outside and their influence on the totality of atoms constituting a person's organism. Finally, Epicurus uses the terms εὐσταθὲς κατάστημα and εὐστάθεια to designate the state of an organism that is experiencing pleasure.⁵³

ich

Post by “Cassius” of June 25, 2020 at 8:12 PM

I think what I am reading there is their attempt to square Epicurus with Aristotle and I agree that it fails. But if what is disturbing to you is 18.3.19 then I think I might have a different take. I

have never considered ataraxia and aponia to be statements of the ultimate end, but simply adverbs that go along with successfully have overcome disturbances and pain while in the process of pursuing the pleasures that make life worth living. So if your concern is that he is demeaning aponia and ataraxia then I think that doesn't bother me as much, for that reason. If "pleasure" is the goal then a series of particular pleasures from day to day is what is being pursued, with ataraxia and aponia being derivative descriptions that are really only useful from the point of view of semantics and debating with Platonists when that is necessary (which hopefully isn't often).

Is that the part that you find disturbing? I am afraid I got distracted this afternoon so I may have lost the train of thought.

Post by "Godfrey" of June 25, 2020 at 8:40 PM

Yes 18.3.19 is the part that bothers me. From the point of view of pleasure it makes sense as you describe and seems to be a good elaboration of PD 5. My concern comes from their statement in the final chapter about a proper theory of pleasure combining Aristotelian/Epicurean and Stoic theories. For a discussion among Epicureans it can be illuminating but if discussing with Platonists and the like it could lead down a rabbit hole and into Wonderland!

Post by "Cassius" of June 26, 2020 at 7:43 AM

Yes I think you are documenting how Gosling & Taylor are ultimately not with Epicurus themselves, but insist on following the party line. I think you are exactly right as to where it would lead.

My main thought I guess is that G&T had enough intellectual honesty / perception to publish what ought to be obvious to most anyone - that the mainstream view of Epicurus is nonsense. But they don't have enough "courage" (or something, I don't want to paint with too broad a brush) to adopt Epicurus' views themselves. The pull of the consensus Academy / Reason / Humanist position (and who knows what else) is too strong for them to break free entirely. Quite possibly they realized that even writing what they did would set them back in their profession -- I see this book cited or mentioned VERY infrequently, even though it seems to be head and shoulders the most thorough and best-researched on the topic.

Post by “Don” of June 26, 2020 at 8:21 AM

This may be off thread a little and a little later to the game, but here goes. And I after with [Cassius](#) 's last post. Academic philosophers probably need to tow the party line to an extent if they want to publish and present.

On 18.3.19, it seems off to me as well, and I mostly agree with [Cassius](#) on his thoughts on ataraxia in that section there. For me, ataraxia and aponia have been simply characteristics of the most pleasant life. The fact that they are both negative (a- "not, no" as in apolitical, atheist, etc.) has struck me as odd; but, as descriptors of pleasure, I think I can see where Epicurus is coming from. Pleasure can be euphoric, washing over you so thoroughly that you get that "wrapped in a warm blanket" feeling, not disturbed, not feeling any pain. Actually, the "-ponia" is cognate with "ponos" which is defined as:

- work, especially hard work; toil
- bodily exertion, exercise
- work, task, business
- the consequence of toil, distress, trouble, suffering

So, the connotation of "aponia" goes beyond what we think of as feeling pain in your body. The non-philosophical definition of "aponia" is actually "laziness, non-exertion."

I don't want to go down a tranquilist rabbit hole, but there's an element of tranquility in there.

I think both academic and popular writers get hung up on Ataraxia and Aponia in Fragment 2 being called katastematic pleasures, but if you look at the whole text below, why aren't euphrosunē and khara obsessed over as well. Ataraxia is used throughout Epicurus's writing simply referring to "peace of mind" but it's hidden by various translations of the Greek.

Here are some examples I found in a quick search. I think it helps to see Ataraxia used in a wider context. My notes are in brackets.

Fragment 519: The greatest fruit of justice is serenity [ataraxia]. δικαιοσύνης καρπὸς μέγιστος ἀταραξία.

[You have peace of mind if you treat people justly.]

Fragment 2: Lack of mental disturbance [ataraxia] and lack of bodily pain [aponia] are static pleasures, whereas revelry [khara] and rejoicing [euphrosunē] are active pleasures involving movement. ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀταραξία καὶ <ἡ> ἀπονία καταστηματικά ἐῖσις ἡδοναί. ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ

εὐφροσύνη κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργεῖα βλέπονται.

[It seems to me that here it's just saying that lack of pain and mental distress don't involve moving around or doing something but they're still pleasurable, revelry and rejoicing by definition seem to involve bodily movement (dancing, singing, merry-making if you will). I realize tons of academic ink have been spilled on this, so I'm sure I haven't settled anything here! Just my take. And I also think this contrasts with the Cyrenaics, to bring it back, who felt all pleasure started in the body not in the mind. Epicurus may be emphasizing both the mind (no disturbance in the mind) and the body (no disturbance in the body) since the Cyrenaics seem to have only recognized pleasure as originating in the body.]

Letter to Menoikos:

The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject [uses same Greek terms for "choice and avoidance"] in terms of the health of the body and the serenity [ataraxia] of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life.

τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἴρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίαιαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἔστι τέλος.

[Here we see "health of the body" (hygieian) and not "aponia" paired with ataraxia. So it's not like the word ataraxia is always paired with the word aponia. And these two are said here to explicitly be the goal/telos of a completely happy life, literally a blessed life using the same word (makarios) to describe the gods in PD 1. I don't think that takes anything away from pleasure. A healthy body and a peaceful mind are pleasurable. But Epicurus's explicit use of telos here is interesting. I think he's just using health (of the body) and ataraxia as synonyms for the most pleasant life, which *is* the goal/telos.]

Letter to Pythocles:

"In the first place, remember that, like everything else, knowledge of celestial phenomena, whether taken along with other things or in isolation, has no other end in view than peace of mind [ataraxia] and firm conviction."

Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν μὴ ἄλλο τι τέλος ἐκ τῆς περὶ μετεώρων γνώσεως εἶτε κατὰ συναφὴν λεγομένων εἶτε αὐτοτελῶς νομίζειν εἶναι ἢπερ ἀταραξίαν καὶ πίστιν βέβαιον, καθάπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν λοιπῶν.

[Here Epicurus calls ataraxia the telos/goal of knowledge. The goal of this knowledge is to have peace of mind or ataraxia. And he emphasizes this in the next excerpt, too.]

Letter to Pythocles:

([96] For in all the celestial phenomena such a line of research is not to be abandoned;) for, if you fight against clear evidence, you never can enjoy genuine peace of mind [ataraxia].

ἦν γὰρ τις ἢ μαχόμενος τοῖς ἐναργήμασιν, οὐδέποτε δυνήσεται ἀταραξίας γνησίου μεταλαβεῖν.

Post by "Cassius" of June 26, 2020 at 9:20 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

The fact that they are both negative (a- "not, no" as in apolitical, atheist, etc.) has struck me as odd; but, as descriptors of pleasure, I think I can see where Epicurus is coming from

It has always seemed to me that "part" of the reason it makes sense to use the negative is that given the premise that everything that is not painful is pleasurable (and the reverse) if you end up talking about specific pleasures, you end up appearing to take sides on what amounts to a ranking of pleasures, which is also a problem. If you talk about cake and pies and ice cream you get labeled as a foodie. If you talk about exploring mountaintops or bicycling or sex or wine or any other particular pleasure, you end up implying that the pleasure which you choose to highlight is among those that "everyone" should choose. If you end up praising the pleasure of painting, or of singing, or of literature, you end up implying that the best life involves those pursuits, when in fact your key and essential premise is that pleasure really is pleasure and totally subjective according to context. Therefore it is essential that you emphasize that there is NOT a ranking or a preferred set of pleasures.

I don't think that's the full explanation by any means. I would expect in the texts that are lost there are lots of discussions of specific pleasures. But I think that this is related to the issue of Epicurus ejecting "logic" from the canon - the commentators make it appear that Epicurus was throwing out all logic and all "culture" when in fact Epicurus was among the most acute logicians and culture-erectors of them all (a point I think DeWitt makes). He doesn't throw out logic and culture, but uses them himself, in his own way, in the service of what he has concluded is the ultimate end (pleasure). His opponents are so adamantly opposed to his conclusion that they caricature him as being opposed to ALL logic and ALL culture, when in fact he was opposed to THEIR logic and THEIR culture, and erecting his own. But they succeeded in erasing the texts where Epicurus presented the positive elements of his program, and what's left can be made to look like something it was not.

All of which is to say that the "negative" approach may be in part an intensely "logical" approach, driven by the underlying premise that it is essential to drive home that all pleasure is desirable. The "negative" wording allows that premise to be driven home without suggesting that some pleasures are higher or better than others (which, if admitted, would logically mean that there is a standard other than pleasure itself by which to judge pleasure).

Post by “Don” of June 26, 2020 at 11:51 AM

Hear, hear, [Cassius](#) ! I wish there was an Epicurean "Amen!" 😊

You're spot on about Epicurus opposing THEIR culture, too.

"Flee from all indoctrination, blessed one, and set sail in your own little boat!"

Post by “Godfrey” of June 26, 2020 at 3:51 PM

Quote

I don't want to go down a tranquilist rabbit hole, but there's an element of tranquility in there.

I agree that there is definitely an element of tranquility in the writings. Tranquility is also part of a well functioning life, as being relatively calm allows for better decision making in addition to allowing for a more complete experience of pleasure. Isn't the big question whether ataraxia is a goal or a byproduct and/or tool?

That's why I like this from 18.3.15 in G&T: "*Once one is convinced of the truth of Epicurus' doctrines and has incorporated his teachings into one's life, one ceases to worry and lives a life as near to ataraxia and aponia as is possible for one.*" This seems like a pretty common sense interpretation to me.

Doesn't the most confusion arise over the part of the letter to Menoikos that cited by [Don](#) , and the paragraph containing it? I'm wondering if focusing on that and the following paragraph might be useful (by "paragraphs," I'm referring to the Saint-Andre translation). The "goal" in the quotation, to me, refers to the fact that all animals seek pleasure and reject pain. Then in the next paragraph pleasure is referred to as the primary and innate good. So is "the good" something different from a biological imperative?

Post by “Cassius” of June 26, 2020 at 4:15 PM

I need to think about your last paragraph but I agree with the second, that this is a common sense interpretation. The elephant in the room is that it is not just common sense but it means that ordinary people living ordinary lives (possibly, even like us) are in fact living and achieving the Epicurean goal, which is relatively easy to achieve.

And there is a passage in *AFewDays InAthens* which makes pretty much that point, if I can find it.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 27, 2020 at 6:27 PM

This is a continuation of notes on Gosling and Taylor's *The Greeks on Pleasure*, begun here: [Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure \(Notes up to but not including Epicurus\)](#) and continued here: [Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure \(Notes on Epicurus\)](#)

For the most part these are quotes and/or paraphrases from the book; my comments are italicized and in parentheses. Text in bold is my emphasis. The authors of the book are not Epicureans, theirs is an academic take on Epicurean pleasure, worthy of discussion. There is much more to their discussion of Epicurus than I've been able to include here, but I think I've covered their main points.

Chapter 19: Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures

(Note: this entire chapter is posted at [Gosling & Taylor, On Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasure](#). What follows here is my personal notes; if you're interested in their complete argument I'd advise reading the full chapter. I've kept my notes pretty brief)

19.2.2 What perception reveals to us directly is the goodness of pleasure and the badness of pain and thereby that the only unqualified good is pleasure without pain. Since any painless perception is pleasant, perception reveals the goodness, though not the achievability, of *aponia*. **The value of *ataraxia* is parasitic upon that of *aponia*, since the only *ataraxia* worth having is that which comes from pleasant memories and confident expectations of sensory pleasures of a painless kind. Thus the body's pleasures have pride of place.** *(Does this bolded statement conflict with, or elaborate on, their statement in 18.3.15: “Once one is convinced of the truth of Epicurus' doctrines and has incorporated his teachings into one's life, one ceases to worry and lives a life as near to *ataraxia* and *aponia* as is possible for one.”)*

19.2.3 Epicurus is inclined to use *ataraxia* and *aponia* as conditions of life, not particular pleasures.

19.2.4 Since *aponia* is just a condition of painless perception it does not mean that Epicurus thought of a non-perceiving state as pleasurable.

19.3.2 ***Katastematic* pleasures refer to "the well-established *katastema* (condition) of the flesh. Not to replenishment, movement, or *katastasis eis phusin* (restoration to the natural state). The latter was an argument against pleasure, on the basis that what was being returned to was the good, not pleasure. When the organism is operating properly it will be in a state of pleasure, and pain is a matter of unnatural operation.**

19.3.3 Therefore *kinetic* pleasures are not a different kind than *katastematic* ones: they too are sensory and a matter of some part of the organism operating properly. Due to this most of Cicero can be discounted in this regard.

19.4.27 ***Ataraxia* is achieved by the removal of superstitious fear and false beliefs, the constant memory of the truth, and attention to present experience and perception. Now the mind is free of disturbance and so memory and expectation operate without anxiety. Similarly when physical pain is removed the body operates without pain and that will mean that always some pleasurable and painless perception is occurring, a condition of good cheer.**

19.4.30 When the organism is functioning harmoniously it is always having some form of perception; since the operation is harmonious the perception is pleasant and without pain; that is just what *aponia* is. *Ataraxia* is the condition when, because of correct views, our expectations are undisturbed by fear, our desires do not pursue empty objectives and our memories are pleasant: this leaves us to enjoy our pleasures unanxiously.

Chapter 20: Pleasure as a Criterion of Truth in Epicurus

20.3.1 The doctrine that the highest pleasure is freedom from pain and distress = the highest pleasure is freedom from consciousness of improper functioning.

20.3.3 **The perception of an oar in the water being bent is true, but determining if it represents reality requires comparison with other perceptions. Similarly with pleasure: the feeling of pleasure regarding a given stimulus is true in that it reveals the proper functioning of the relevant part of the organism. The belief that it is choiceworthy, however, requires confirmation by other appearances.**

20.3.4 **Pleasure is an unimpeded actualization of the natural state. The psycho-physical organism has a built-in urge toward its proper functioning, and consequently sees the pursuit of pleasure, understood as consciousness of proper functioning, as the way of life dictated by man's nature and hence as the appropriate way of life for a man.**

20.3.4 In order to avoid error one must not affirm that things are precisely as they appear, but one must distinguish those judgments which are confirmed by further appearances and those which are not, taking the former as true and the latter as false. One's judgement must be determined, not by the immediate appearance (as of pleasure or pain), but by the goal which nature sets: the life of unhindered, that is painless, physical and mental functioning.

20.4.1 As thus interpreted, the theory is open to a basic objection. We have argued that the physical reality which is truly represented by the feeling of pleasure is the proper functioning of that part of the organism where the pleasure is felt. But if that pleasure leads, not to the unhindered functioning of the whole organism, but to subsequent pains, i.e. malfunctions, then surely the original function which was felt as pleasure could not have been *proper* functioning, since the proper functioning of any part must be what contributes to the smooth functioning of the whole. This is a difficulty for the theory, not the interpretation, and it applies for any theory (not only Epicurean) that maintains that pleasure is a restoration of the natural state and that certain pleasures result, not in the restoration of the natural state but in unnatural states accompanied by distress. (*Does 20.3.3 above overcome this objection? Isn't that how the theory describes the physical reality?*)

20.4.1 This objection can be met, given more precision in the formulation of the theory. Example: the proper functioning of the nutritive organs consist in the ingestion of food, in that this allows the organism as a whole to feel free from the distress of hunger. Therefore we are constituted to feel pleasure when we eat. If someone eats to excess, the defect does not lie with his nutritive organs, which are working properly and so produce pleasure, but in his lack of recognition of the limit to which that function should be exercised. Epicurus addresses this in PD 18-21.

20.4.2 What about empty desires, which don't contribute to any natural good? Practical wisdom encourages eliminating these, yet as long as pleasure is felt they are considered to be good. If these are not appropriate to the organism, but to a disordered nature, then that empties the notion of appropriateness is emptied of content. (*Again see 20.3.3 above.*)

20.5.2 The main objection to the account of pleasure, that it cannot deal successfully with unnecessary pleasures, is in fact an objection to the general theory of Epicurus. That theory is an impressively systematic attempt to revive the early physiological accounts of pleasure as a form of perception, and to apply it to the epistemological theory which fitted the general account of perception. In thus striving for generality it paid the usual price, failure to deal with recalcitrant counter instances. As always, the multi-colored butterfly of pleasure eludes the net of necessary and sufficient conditions. (*Once again see 20.3.3. Since I'm an amateur at this, can anybody explain this last sentence to me? What would be necessary, and what would be sufficient?*)

Chapter 21: The Stoics

(As I understand this chapter, their argument is that the Stoic theory of pleasure would be a part of the idea that any impression must be assented to. My thinking is that while this has some value for therapy for, say, addiction or anger management, this is not how pleasure functions. Pleasure and pain occur as perceptions, before the opportunity for assent. Choice and avoidance again are as described in 20.3.3.)

21.7.1 A fully adequate theory of pleasure needs to combine the Stoic insights (regarding pleasure as a belief, an assent) with elements drawn from other theories, in particular something more like an Aristotelean/Epicurean theory of enjoyment. Gosling regards being pleased, rather than enjoyment, as the central concept in the elucidation of the complex phenomena of pleasure. The book ends with a footnote referencing another book by Gosling for his take on a complete theory of pleasure. *(A poor excuse for a cliffhanger if you ask me.)*

(This concludes my decidedly non-scholarly notes on the book. It is an excellent though very academic book, but were it not for the fact that over half of the book is dedicated to Plato, I would heartily recommend it. It was challenging but worth the effort that I put into it. A richer knowledge of ancient Greek philosophy than I possess, and perhaps more effort than I was able to put into it, would prove it to be richly rewarding.)

Post by “Don” of June 27, 2020 at 7:31 PM

[Godfrey](#) : Thank you so much for posting your notes! There's a lot to dig into, and we owe you a debt of gratitude for sharing your work, insights, and questions for discussion!

Post by “Godfrey” of June 27, 2020 at 7:36 PM

You're welcome [Don](#) ; my pleasure!

Post by “Charles” of June 27, 2020 at 11:25 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

The value of ataraxia is parasitic upon that of aponia, since the only ataraxia worth having is that which comes from pleasant memories and confident expectations of sensory pleasures of a painless kind. Thus the body's pleasures have pride of place.

This is an interesting point, for the longest time I had only considered that the static, or pleasures regarding ataraxia could only result from a recollection of previous pleasures, as noticed from Epicurus' Letter to Idomeneus. But having read other literature and sources that did not prove that this was necessarily so in every instance (Aristippus section from DL), it's always been clear that the two concepts are redundant, or at least aponia is, since ataraxia implies a state that pain would make impossible.

So then, the model of pleasure follows a route of continuous pleasure, found both in the sensory pleasures here and now, with the possibility of pleasure in the long run, or in the present when reflecting upon previous pleasures.

Post by “Cassius” of June 28, 2020 at 7:32 AM

in reading the above, I kept looking for a plain and simple statement of what appears to be the fundamental premise about all this in Epicurean theory. Would this be correct?

"Perceptions" and "sensations" are closely related terms describing different aspects of the mechanisms of experience that generate what we call "feeling." There are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, which means that everything we experience is either pleasurable or painful. All of the discussion about highest and best pleasures and their duration and evaluation revolve around the basic observation that all experience is either one or the other, which means that the presence of one means the absence of the other, and thus that the purest/most intense form of experiencing either one is when the other is totally absent. Life is all about feeling, and the state of being without feeling is nothing to us (death).

The reason this sounds sterile is that it is a high level abstract analysis useful for framing the debate with Plato and dialecticians and defeating their arguments. The advice of Epicurus is not to live in this world of words, however, but of feeling, and if we stay in this mode for too long, longer than is necessary to see the perversity of the dialecticians, then we become trapped like flies on flypaper. The point of Epicurean philosophy is to see this dialectical trap and escape from it to the real world of feeling, not linger in the world of dialectics thinking that we've reached some height of "ataraxia" simply because we have succeeded in pointing out that the Emperor Plato and his minions have no clothes.

Post by “Don” of June 28, 2020 at 8:58 AM

Quote

"Perceptions" and "sensations" are closely related terms describing different aspects of the mechanisms of experience that generate what we call "feeling." There are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, which means that everything we experience is either pleasurable or painful. All of the discussion about highest and best pleasures and their duration and evaluation revolve around the basic observation that all experience is either one or the other, which means that the presence of one means the absence of the other, and thus that the purest/most intense form of experiencing either one is when the other is totally absent. Life is all about feeling, and the state of being without feeling is nothing to us (death).

I think this is a good start at a concise summary; however, It is important to remember what words Epicurus used so we're not going in a circle. The problem is that English words don't always convey the same or full meaning of Epicurus's language.

I like your statement "everything we experience is either pleasurable or painful." Pathē πάθη was the word Epicurus used to describe pleasure and pain and this word literally at its most basic means "[that which happens to a person, that which one had experienced.](#)" So, Epicurus was saying that ALL that we experience can ONLY be experienced as either pleasure or pain which goes back to his assertion that there is no neutral state between these two. So, your sentence I quoted is spot on, but I think saying there are only two feelings can confuse people because English "feelings" cover such a wide range of... Feelings: I feel happy, I feel sad, I feel sick, I feel sorry, etc.

And then I'm with you up until your last sentence: "Life is all about feeling, and the state of being without feeling is nothing to us (death)." Again, using that English word, makes it sound like it is all about "feeling" happy, sad, sick, tired, etc. But [death is nothing to us](#) because we can't experience anything any longer after we die. The word Epicurus uses in PD2 is ἀναίσθητος "[lacking perception; unconscious, insensate.](#)" When we die, we lose the ability to "experience" pleasure or pain and so [death is nothing to us](#), literally in a manner of speaking.

Post by “Cassius” of June 28, 2020 at 9:00 AM

Yes the issue is with the word "pathe" which just doesn't work in English conversation. What word does?

Post by “Don” of June 28, 2020 at 9:56 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes the issue is with the word "pathe" which just doesn't work in English conversation. What word does?

Good question 😊

Consider the shades of meaning of the following:

- I feel pleasure or pain
- I experience pleasure or pain
- I sense pleasure or pain
- I perceive pleasure or pain
- I undergo pleasure or pain
- There are two feelings
- There are two sensations
- There are two emotions
- There are two passions
- There are two impressions
- There are two perceptions
- There are two subjective responses

I'm NOT saying these are equally adequate but rather trying to get at the range covered by pathē. I don't have the answer, just expanding the problem. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of June 28, 2020 at 11:05 AM

Yep that expands the problem! 😊 Quite possibly the root of the problem is that the religionists and the Platonists not only won over the ancient schools, they succeeded in removing from the language the proper alternative means of discussing the guides of life that are true, rather than

their own words for the discussion of gods and virtue.

Post by “Don” of June 28, 2020 at 12:11 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yep that expands the problem! 😊 Quite possibly the root of the problem is that the religionists and the Platonists not only won over the ancient schools, they succeeded in removing from the language the proper alternative means of discussing the guides of life that are true, rather than their own words for the discussion of gods and virtue.

Yep. For the same reason you build churches on the sites of pagan temples: Wipe out or appropriate.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 28, 2020 at 2:51 PM

We could just use *pathe* (although auto-correct turned that into pathetic, which could be a problem). We frequently use *ataraxia*, which at times involves discussion as to what exactly that means. *Pathe* emphasizes the original idea, and might promote discussion in a useful way as to what exactly that means. This might be more useful than trying to find an English word that doesn't quite fit.

Having said that, another word that comes to mind is "guide." (There are two guides, pleasure and pain.) This emphasizes the functional aspect of the *pathe* and is a good example of an English word that doesn't quite fit.

Similarly with *prolepsis*: anticipations and preconceptions don't quite fit and we all have a favorite one of these that we use. Once a person understands the basic ideas, that interchangeability is fine.

Post by “Don” of June 28, 2020 at 7:07 PM

Oh, the hazards of autocorrect. I know it well 😊

I'm certainly not opposed to using the original transliterated Greek. I do seem to remember that [Cassius](#) is wary of *eudaimonia*. One issue is most people wouldn't know what the pathē are, so it's a level of obfuscation that works need clearing up.

Two ways of paraphrasing our issue are:

There are only two ways of experiencing the world: through pleasure or through pain.

...Or...

Epicurus taught that all experiences are either pleasurable or painful. There is no in-between state.

We need to get away from saying there are only two feelings. We know what it means, but it flies in the face of most people's "common sense."

PS: Although I do kind of like [Godfrey](#) 's "guide" and feel it would be worthwhile to integrate that. My suggestions above get at the experience part but [Godfrey](#) gets at the fact that pleasure and pain are criteria of truth, guides if you will.

Post by “Cassius” of June 28, 2020 at 9:14 PM

Don or Godfrey, both of you may know the ancient languages better than me -- Do either of you know what latin word might have been used by Cicero or Lucretius in discussing pathe? My experience is that the latin words frequently have a more familiar ring to them than the Greek but I am not sure what they used rather than pathe. I know Lucretius used voluptas for pleasure which is an example of having a better (but far from perfect) ring to it in a modern english ear. You're right that "pathetic" probably makes pathe a non-starter. The point Godfrey was referencing is that I do think that using an untranslated word from a foreign language is usually a bad idea. Surely we can express the same meaning in English, even if we have to force-combine or otherwise coin a term.

Thinking back to my original source of all philosophic inspiration, Star Trek Original Series, I remember the episode entitled "the EmPATH" which ranks near the top of my all time LEAST favorite episodes. So I start with a poor impression of the word "pathe" from many angles 😊

Post by “Don” of June 29, 2020 at 10:09 AM

Unfortunately, Latin is not my forte. I'll defer to others on that one.

For my contribution, in poking around on the Perseus Digital Library, it seemed like *maybe* [variations on sentiō were used by Lucretius and Cicero \(who are cited in the definition\)](#). However, I also seemed to be seeing Cicero would just say "pleasure and pain" (voluptas et dolores?) and it gets translated as "feelings of pleasure and pain."

Post by "Godfrey" of June 29, 2020 at 3:09 PM

Sorry to say that I'm ignorant when it comes to ancient languages. Most of what I know I've learned from studying Epicurus.

Post by "Cassius" of June 29, 2020 at 3:19 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Unfortunately, Latin is not my forte. I'll defer to others on that one.

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That would not be surprising to me. I get the impression that sensation might be the best umbrella word after all and that the term "five senses" is more of a problem than a help. We might need to dig into how it became thought that that name came to be considered a good term for the "first leg" of the canonical tripod.

The Romans should have had enough understanding of Epicurus to get these terms correct, and I tend to think that their word choices probably deserve more credit than we give them.

Post by "Cassius" of June 29, 2020 at 3:33 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Epicurus believed that both aspects of his philosophy were discoverable through an epistemology of sensation, feeling, and anticipation—an epistemology that was therefore not strictly empirical.

Joshua just posted this sentence recently in another thread. I could find countless numbers where I list the epistemology the same way.

And yet I can't get free of the feeling that in this list - sensation, feeling, and anticipation - we are still spinning around with less precision than we should. Do not the words "sensation" and "feeling" denote almost exactly the same thing to us today in English? At least in terms of touch, we tend to say after we touch something "How does it **feel**?" Not so with sight, or hearing, or smell, or taste, however.

Do the names of the categories really tell us what the difference between the "five senses" are from the "feelings" of pain and pleasure? I know at times I have deferred to a term like "natural faculties" as the catch-all name to include all three but I have no strong opinion that any formulation I've ever heard really captures the subject well.

Maybe the standard terms of sense / sensation and feeling are indeed the best words to use, but we definitely need a very clear definition attached to them at the start as to what they are intended to convey, and what they include and what they don't.

And of course in this discussion we haven't really touched at all on anticipations, but if indeed this list of three has any parallel at all within it, then anticipations must be a form of "sense" as well -- at least in the manner of speaking so as to reference a "faculty of contact between our minds and the world outside our minds" or a "faculty by which our minds make contact with the world outside our minds" or a "mechanism by which our minds perceive the world outside our minds."

But even then we probably need to include more than just "the world outside our minds" since we are pretty clearly including the pleasure or pain we feel at our own thoughts/memories, which are presumably part of and within our own minds.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 29, 2020 at 4:12 PM

I typed παθη Latin translation into Google and got "passio." Passions distinguishes from sensations but has its own set of problems.

"Embodied cognition" is for me a very descriptive phrase for the prolepseis and perhaps for the entire Canon. But this apparently has woo woo connotations in some circles. Also if it can be used for both prolepseis and for the Canon then that isn't very helpful.

Post by “Joshua” of June 29, 2020 at 4:29 PM

This is a thread I've been following casually but haven't had time to thoroughly digest.

It seems to me that 'sensation' is meant to carry the meaning of something sensed objectively.

I don't like beer. For many, drinking beer stimulates a feeling of pleasure. For me, it's a kind of mild revulsion—a type of pain. But in both cases the objective sensation is the same; my friend and I both sense that the beer is cold, slightly bitter, tasting of hops and alcohol, and so forth.

But the thing is, with brain scans it *is* possible to notice objectively the experience of pleasure and pain. So I'm not certain where that leaves us.

Post by “Don” of June 29, 2020 at 4:48 PM

Excellent point, [Joshua](#) ! Your beer analogy finally lit a light bulb for me.

This reminds me that my wife and I are watching the [Netflix doc series Babies](#). I have found it fascinating and keep seeing the learning and "pre-wiring" of the babies and toddlers as echoing the idea of innate prolepseis. I was also listening to [apodcast with Alan Alda and Cori Bargmann that talked about the innate chemical receptors in the brain](#) that also reminded me of prolepseis.

Post by “Cassius” of June 29, 2020 at 7:16 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

something sensed objectively.

I think you are going in the right direction but the word "objectively" is probably a dead end. I think Epicurus is using pain and pleasure as totally subjective and we alone are the judge of it -- if it feels good, it is pleasurable, if it feels bad it is painful. If there were an "objective" standard then we would have something absolute higher than our own pain and pleasure and I think the physics / cosmology rules that out.

And oh yes, "passions" is definitely another word that needs to be considered. And yes that word has been corrupted even more so than pleasure. But passions is probably most directly related to Pathe and so part of the heritage of the words.

Post by “Joshua” of June 29, 2020 at 7:43 PM

That's actually the very distinction I was trying to draw with the beer analogy!

Sensation (ie 'cold, hot, sweet, sour'): objective

Feeling (pleasure or pain): subjective

There's certainly nothing objective about pleasure. Even with my brain-scan thought experiment, the obvious objection to make is that the feeling of pleasure remains subjective. The visual sense that detects an image of a brain experiencing pleasure is objective.

Post by “Don” of June 29, 2020 at 7:54 PM

I think I see where [Joshua](#) is coming from with the "objective." Please correct me, [Joshua](#) , if I misinterpret!

He's not saying it's an objective abstract *standard*. It's a visible, objective *reaction* in the brain if you're looking at a fMRI scan. You can literally see the "pleasure" or "pain" centers lighting up in the brain. The pathē of pleasure or pain can be objectively observed by science now. It is the "subjective" assessment of those pathē that determine our choices and rejections.

According to that one program I listened to, animals are wired to find sweet pleasurable and bitterness painful. Scientists know the chemical and neural pathways. But some people can learn to choose bitter coffee or beer and eventually find pleasure in it.

Post by “Don” of June 29, 2020 at 11:59 PM

[Cassius](#) brought up earlier the three-legged Canon, so I went back to see the three original words:

[αἰσθήσις](#) (aisthēsis), Latin *sensus*. sense-perception, sensation, perception from the senses (incidentally, the source of "aesthetic")

[προλήψις](#) (prolepsis) preconception, mental picture, anticipation

[πάθη](#) (pathē) that which happens to someone, one definition is also sensation, passion, emotion

From this, it appears that the pathē are not apprehended through the [five \(or more\) senses](#) but are experienced directly. The senses are covered under aisthēsis, so why would you need two of only three Canonic criteria that deal with the senses. I'm not sure how this would work (How else do you experience something?) But it takes me back to my earlier posts about "We experience the world in one of two ways: pleasure or pain." It's a direct hard-wired experience that we feel viscerally.

Is the order important here? This may be basic stuff, but I'm just coming to this realization as I type:

1. The senses directly receive stimuli from objective reality. (aisthēsis)
2. The stimuli are automatically processed by means of preexisting patterns in your brain from both heredity/genes and learning (prolepsis)
3. The processed stimuli then trigger either pleasure or pain and you experience one or the other "feeling" (pathē)

Finally, you assess those two "feelings" using your practical wisdom to make choices and rejections.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 30, 2020 at 1:46 AM

As to Cassius' earlier objection to calling it "objective" reality, maybe "material" reality is more accurate.

According to EP as I understand it, this also allows for *eidola* (dreams, visions of the gods; also thoughts? Not sure about thoughts...) to be received by the senses. It seems like evaluative thinking would follow this sequence as well, with thoughts replacing sensations. I'm not sure

what contemporary neuroscience has to say about that, though.

Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2020 at 5:01 AM

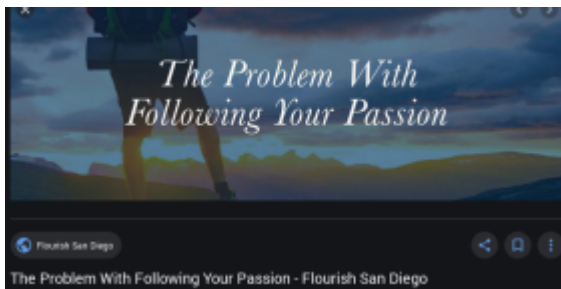
I think that again we need to keep in mind how important "images" seem to have been to the Epicureans, and maybe we don't appreciate how they were understanding them.

I also need to reread the DeWitt chapter(s) on the canon. He wrestles with all this and if I recall correctly seems to have had some productive things to say about how the three categories work together.

Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2020 at 8:37 AM

As I wake up today on June 30, I am thinking that the word "passion" probably has the best potential as having a combination of these factors:

- 1 - Derives (probably/possibly) from the original core pathē. Or at least it easily evokes the original word.
- 2 - Indicates intensity and is incompatible with the common understanding of "absence of pain"
- 3- Easily understandable and gripping in a way that "pleasure" does not convey today.
- 4- Although I don't have any cites at the moment, "passion" is used in the way we are using it in some of the english literature.
- 5 - Is guaranteed to drive the Platonists and Stoics wild, as indicated in this clip from FLOURISHsandiego (I am just attaching the picture rather than the article. The standard Socratics/Platonists/Aristotelians LOVE "flourishing" and HATE "passion." 😊)



I need to make some posts on this topic but I know for myself in addition to the deep discussions we are pursuing I need to budget my time to make more graphics with pithy summaries of the core points which we can use to post different places and hopefully drive more traffic to us, which is motivational for the reasons we have been discussing (we're not just disembodied minds - that's the Platonist/Stoics).

We have a stable of them now, but it's always motivational to produce more:
<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/gallery/in...t/207-outreach/>