

On "Desires" And Their Relationship To Pleasure

Post by "Godfrey" of September 10, 2020 at 2:53 PM

[Cassius Admin Note: This thread was excerpted from a longer discussion on another topic, but it quickly turns into a discussion of desire and its relationship to pleasure.]

Say I have a headache. An aspirin might remove the pain, in which case you could say that the resulting pleasure is a byproduct. Or a pleasant nap in the shade might remove the pain, where you could consider pleasure to be the active principle.

Or say I'm depressed. I could take a pill, which might remove the pain, with pleasure as a byproduct. Or I could actively pursue activities meaningful to me, pleasure being the active principle.

I'm not sure where I'm going with this, but having put the thoughts in writing I would react that using pleasure as the active principle is certainly more empowering and, well, pleasurable.

Post by "Don" of September 10, 2020 at 3:13 PM

I don't think I agree with that, but let me talk this out.

Quote

Say I have a headache. An aspirin might remove the pain, in which case you could say that the resulting pleasure is a byproduct. Or a pleasant nap in the shade might remove the pain, where you could consider pleasure to be the active principle.

Is the decision to take the aspirin pleasurable? Does pleasure precede the removal of the pain in this way? Then when the headache is gone, is that a stable pleasure?

Yes, the nap is a pleasurable activity. Does that fall then into the kinetic pleasures.

Epicurus did seem to differentiate among kinds of pleasures: joy, merriment, ataraxia, aponia, the pleasures from eating bread and water if you're hungry, etc. BUT they are all pleasure, none better than others. And we decide on pleasures to pursue by their consequences.

Quote

Or say I'm depressed. I could take a pill, which might remove the pain, with pleasure as a byproduct. Or I could actively pursue activities meaningful to me, pleasure being the active principle.

Same here. Is the decision to take the pill pleasurable? According to Epicurus, it has to be pleasure or pain. Every action has to elicit a reaction either painful or pleasurable. He didn't leave any middle ground.

Thoughts?

Post by “Cassius” of September 10, 2020 at 3:54 PM

I think you're on the right track to say that there are all sorts of types of pleasures, and some occur with the removal of pain, and some occur when we shift our attention from one pleasure to another.

As I understand it a classic example of a pleasure that is not a removal of pain or want is that of smelling a rose. The smell does not necessarily remove a pain, and we weren't "in lack of a good smell" before smelling it. Our attention turned from one pleasure to another without any removal or displacement of any sort of pain.

Again I think we generously acknowledge that there are all sorts of pleasures, without ever flipping all this on it's head by saying that the goal is "absence of pain." The goal is technically only "absence of pain" from a very very limited perspective - when we are talking about the total quantity of human experience and we're observing that we want the totality of experience to be pleasure(s) with as little pain(s) as possible (preferably, but perhaps not practically for a human, zero).

Post by “Cassius” of September 10, 2020 at 3:56 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I would react that using pleasure as the active principle is certainly more empowering and, well, pleasurable.

I absolutely agree with that and would say it is so blindingly obvious as to not need saying, except that we are confronted with a real life situation (in which there are apparently as many as there are professional philosophers) in which we DO have to say it.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 10, 2020 at 4:41 PM

Quote

Is the decision to take the pill pleasurable? According to Epicurus, it has to be pleasure or pain. Every action has to elicit a reaction either painful or pleasurable. He didn't leave any middle ground.

In this case, taking the pill is not necessarily pleasurable (unless you take it with honey as per Lucretius 😊). It is a reaction to the pain. If the pain goes away then that's pleasurable. So we're following the feelings as a guide to action. Pleasure can be an attraction and/or a reward, pain an aversion and/or punishment. We can either strive to elicit a feeling, or notice and respond to a feeling. Or one after the other. That's how we've evolved to operate, to my understanding.

But you're raising an interesting point Don in that taking a pill *could* be considered a neutral act. That brings two thoughts to mind. 1) An act (or state) is never neutral, but our lack of attention to the act may make it appear neutral. 2) An act (or state) may be subservient to another act or state and so may appear neutral because of 1). Which leads to 3) the more aware we are of our feelings, the more pleasure there is available to us. Which then becomes another argument against pursuing "absence."

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2020 at 5:33 PM

Hmmm...

I don't think so. Let me talk through the headache scenario to see where I end up:

Headache - pain

Desire to remove that pain - pleasure in anticipating the removal; kinetic pleasure?

Desire to locate and take medication - same pleasure continues

Taking medication - kinetic pleasure similar to eating to alleviate hunger.

Removal of pain - stable pleasure

There is no neutral state according to Epicurus. We must be experiencing or feeling either pleasure or pain.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 10, 2020 at 6:43 PM

I didn't state that very well: I'm agreeing that there's no neutral state.

Quote

1) An act (or state) is never neutral, but our lack of attention to the act may make it appear neutral.

This was intended as a rebuttal to someone who might think something is a neutral state.

As for the desire to remove the headache pain in your walk-through, I guess you could call that a pleasure of anticipation but I would just call it a desire to remove pain: an avoidance of pain. Same with the desire to locate and take medicine. But these are *subjective*: your experience might be the anticipation of the pleasure of relief, but I'm imagining being in the throes of the headache and just wanting to get rid of it. We both experience pleasure as it begins to dissipate. Further, although eating is generally a pleasurable experience, not so with taking a pill. Again, that's subjective but the relief of hunger or of the headache are both pleasures. My point is that daily experience is a constant interplay between pleasure and pain, our reactions to them and our choices and avoidances regarding them. This is biology, whether our goal is pleasure or the absence of pain. However our higher level choice of a goal affects how we approach everything and, at least to me, this is the key difference between our approach and Jordan's.

I brought up the neutral act/state because I think that that is a place where someone pursuing "absence of pain" would be likely to go astray, thinking that they're experiencing a "fancy pleasure" when they've really just dulled their feelings.

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2020 at 7:09 PM

Quote

I guess you could call that a pleasure of anticipation but I would just call it a desire to remove pain: an avoidance of pain.

Ah! But isn't the "desire to remove pain" a pleasure? You are in pain and have a pleasant desire to alleviate that pain. The desire and anticipation of relief is pleasurable. I know that's not the usual way to think about it! But I'm wondering - viewing it through an Epicurean lens - if that desire can't be considered a pleasure since Epicurus says "You have to tell me if your reaction to that desire itself is pleasure or pain. Why are you pursuing it? Because the consequence of that desire leads to more pleasure than pain."

Post by "Godfrey" of September 10, 2020 at 8:01 PM

This is where I distinguish between faculties and impulses. I think that biologically it's a difference between serotonin and dopamine if I understand it correctly. I've been trying to clarify this for myself and I think it's an important detail although I may be in left field.

All pleasures are good, all pains are bad. These are faculties. But some desires are natural, some vain, some needed for life or for well being or other reasons. These are impulses, as I've been thinking of them. The removal of pain is a pleasure due to their dichotomous relationship. But the *desire* to remove pain might be pleasurable or it might not be.

Quote

"You have to tell me if your reaction to that desire itself is pleasure or pain. Why are you pursuing it? Because the consequence of that desire leads to more pleasure than pain."

Bingo! It's not the desire itself that's a pleasure or pain, it's your *reactions* to it and to the consequences of it.

Post by "Don" of September 10, 2020 at 8:48 PM

I think I agree ☐☐

I'm trying to wrap my brain around your last statement:

Quote

It's not the desire itself that's a pleasure or pain, it's your *reactions* to it and to the consequences of it.

I definitely agree that desires are neither good nor bad, but I'm trying to decide if that means that I don't think they're pleasurable or painful.

We have a desire, what you're calling an impulse. What comprises a desire/impulse? It has to be a cognitive event or an act of reason. Right? We have to think about the desire. But we have a reaction to that rational act, a pre-rational reaction that is pleasurable or painful through our canonical faculty of the pathē/feelings. So, if I read you correctly: the thought or desire itself - the cognitive rational impulse brought into being by our material brain's function - cannot itself be a pleasure. But that impulse provokes a reaction in our reflexive pre-rational faculty.

So then...Is there such a thing as "a pleasure" or is it always "an experience of pleasure" or "a pleasant experience." Same for pain. Does pain exist as an entity or can it only be a painful experience. Pain cannot exist outside of experience. Or can it. Is pain a thing? Is pleasure a thing? It can these two only be experienced?

I have a feeling that I'm meeting you by the rabbit hole in left field 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of September 10, 2020 at 10:05 PM

Exactly! But as I think further an impulse isn't cognitive/rational: it's an urge to act. A desire can be cognitive/rational or not.

For instance advertising is designed to create a desire for something. Maybe craving is a useful word. A desire/impulse/craving can stimulate a pathē/feeling as you describe.

Biologically, to my limited and simplistic understanding, dopamine is involved in anticipation, craving and desire. Serotonin is involved in pleasure/pain. To me this is a potentially helpful distinction, although I'm really not sure if this is scientifically accurate....

Maybe we should go ask Alice 😊 (I'm dating myself on that one!)

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2020 at 10:36 PM

Hmm...

I *think* there has to be a rational aspect in this. The use of the words desire, craving, urge, etc. strike me as cognitive experiences. That's why Epicurus can say desires are the result of groundless beliefs or not.

One has a belief - a thought in your mind - that is either based on truth or not, based on whether we accept the truth of our sensations and mental perceptions or not.

That belief then leads to a desire. "I believe i need that." "I want that." I think this can even be subconscious - you just feel like you need something. Or you're hungry. That's a more immediate desire based on your sensation of an empty stomach.

Epicureans then weigh what happens if the consequence of that desire, urge, impulse, is achieved or it is not. In the case of hunger, you'll want to satisfy that desire... But how? And are you actually hungry (paying attention to Sensations) or are you emotionally or stress eating. I can be guilty of that! Not applying my Epicurean practices.

Those considered consequences elicit a pleasurable or painful reaction or feeling.

We then make a choice to pursue that desire or to flee from it based on that feeling.

Non-Epicureans don't weigh consequences necessarily. If they see a pleasurable experience arising from that desire, they follow it. No matter if it leads to pain down the road or not.

And just so you know, I'm basically going full stream of consciousness here. You all are just along for the ride ☐☐

PS I got the Alice reference 😊

Post by "Don" of September 11, 2020 at 5:43 AM

I think it's important to remember what word Epicurus used to refer to "desire" επιθυμία epithumia. From LSJ:

ἐπιθυμία, Ion. -ιη, ἡ, **A. [select]** *desire, yearning*, "ἐ. ἐκτελέσαι" [Hdt.1.32](#); ἐπιθυμία by *passion*, opp. [προνοία](#), [Th.6.13](#): generally, *appetite*, [Pl.Cra.419d](#), etc.; [αἰ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα ἐ. Id. Phd.82c](#); esp. *sexual desire, lust*, [Democr.234](#) (pl.), [Pl.Phdr.232b](#), etc.; [αἰ πρὸς τοὺς παῖδας ἐ. X. Lac.2.14](#).

2. [select]. c. gen., *longing after a thing, desire of or for it*, [ὑδατος, τοῦ πιεῖν, Th.2.52, 7.84](#), etc.; "[τοῦ πλέονος](#)" [Democr. 224](#); "[τῆς τιμωρίας](#)" [Antipho 2.1.7](#); "[τῆς μεθ' ὑμῶν πολιτείας](#)"

[And.2.10](#); “[τῆς παρθενίας](#)” [Pl.Cra.406b](#); “[εἰς ἑ. τινὸς ἐλθεῖν](#)” [Id.Criti.113d](#); [ἐν ἑ. “τινὸς εἶναι”](#) [Id.Prt.318a](#), [Tht.143e](#); “[γεγονέναι](#)” [Id.Lg.841c](#); [εἰς ἑ. τινὸς “ἀφικέσθαι θεάσασθαι”](#) [Id.Ti.19b](#); “[ἑ. τινὸς ἐμβαλεῖν τινί](#)” [X.Cyr.1.1.5](#); [ἑ. ἐμποιεῖν ἔς τινα](#) *an inclination towards* . . , [Th.4.81](#).

II. **[select]** . = [ἐπιθύμημα](#), *object of desire*, [ἐπιθυμίας τυχεῖν](#) [Thalesap.Stob.3.1.172](#), cf. [Lync.ap. Ath.7.295a](#); [ἀνδρὸς ἑ.](#), of woman, [Secund.Sent.8](#); [πενήτων ἑ.](#), of sleep, prob. in [ib.13](#).

Post by “Godfrey” of September 11, 2020 at 5:15 PM

Are we in agreement that desires are distinct from pleasures?

As to desires v impulses, I'm thinking that that might be going too far down the rabbit hole to be useful. What's important regarding desires is evaluating them as to whether or not to pursue them. In order to do that we must be cognitively aware of them which is the point at which they become useful.

Post by “Cassius” of September 11, 2020 at 7:25 PM

As for me I agree that as used in English the word "desire" definitely implies something different than a "pleasure." I see the contrast being that between a fully formed mental concept (desire) vs an automatic "feeling" (Pleasure).

I say "in English" because Don's list of greek words has me concerned about being too broad!



Post by “Don” of September 11, 2020 at 8:22 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Are we in agreement that desires are distinct from pleasures?

Yes!

I'm still wrestling with the word pleasure. This may be pedantic or semantic but, I don't think "a pleasure" is a thing. This strikes me as somewhat Platonic as if there's Pleasure out there. We can construct a sentence as "Pleasure is X." But I think pleasures have to be directly associated with an action, whether that's an external action (eating ice cream) or internal action (satiety after eating). More specifically, pleasure is only our reaction to an action.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

As to desires v impulses, I'm thinking that that might be going too far down the rabbit hole to be useful. What's important regarding desires is evaluating them as to whether or not to pursue them. In order to do that we must be cognitively aware of them which is the point at which they become useful.

Agreed!

Post by “Godfrey” of September 11, 2020 at 9:40 PM

In terms of the Canon, I think pleasure/pain is a reaction to a sensation or prolepsis more than to an action directly, sort of an ongoing feedback loop with feelings being the feedback. Physical actions cause sensations, to which feelings are reactions. Do mental actions stimulate prolepses to which feelings are a response? Since there's some uncertainty regarding the prolepses, I'm not sure if this holds. It seems logical though. Maybe I should say it feels right.



Post by “Don” of September 11, 2020 at 11:10 PM

Here's my perspective, as of this writing. Let's call it a work in progress:

The canonical faculties are Sensations, Mental Perceptions (or Prolepses), and Feelings (of Pleasure/Pain).

I want to say I read this elsewhere on the forum so bear with me:

We sense something in the real world either through our physical senses (smelling, tasting, touching, etc.) OR our mental Perceptions (thinking) THEN this elicits a reaction of pleasure or pain.

So, in light of this, I think a desire is a mental perception to which we have a pleasurable or painful reaction. But what are desires like? Or made of?

One selection where Epicurus talks about desires is:

Quote

...keep in mind that some desires are natural whereas others are groundless; that among the natural desires some are natural and necessary whereas others are merely natural; and that among the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, some for physical health, and some for life itself.

Necessary desires are required for different reasons. And also...

Quote

PD 11: If we had never been molested by alarms at celestial and atmospheric phenomena, nor by the misgiving that death somehow affects us, nor by neglect of the proper limits of pains and desires, we should have had no need to study natural science.

Here we are told we need to learn the limits of both pains and desires. I would say that pains are limited to short if severe, bearable if long; desires are limited to natural and necessary. Not that we can limit them, but that we need to learn the limits of them. But Epicurus also wrote:

Quote

VS 135. If you want to be wealthy, Pythocles, don't increase your riches but reduce your desires.

Seneca also uses this. In light of the last quote, it would seem to mean "be aware of the limits of his desires" although the original just says "take away desires." Concentrate on natural and necessary ones.

So, we've seen desires paired with pains. Now this:

Quote

VS 203. Insofar as you forget nature, you will find yourself in trouble and create for yourself endless fears and desires.

From this, we have to ask ourselves what are the similarities between fears and desires? Among pains, fears, desires? Can fears be groundless or empty like desires? Or natural? Or have limits? What allowed the comparison? Could fears be the mirror of desires? One attracts,

the other repels? Could these be the mental parallel of the feelings of pain and pleasure? Fear and desire?

Quote

485. Unhappiness (kakodaimonia - the opposite of eudaimonia) is caused by fears, or by endless and empty desires; but he who is able to rein these in creates for himself a blissful understanding.

So, kakodaimonia can be caused both by fears and desires... So there is a common effect those two can have. So fear and desire, but not any desires - only endless, empty ones. And here it says one can "rein in" both fears and endless, empty desires. What does it mean to "rein" them in? Does that again refer to understanding limits or something else? It would seem to follow that eudaimonia/happiness can be caused by the opposite of fears (?) and limited (not endless) desires based on true Philosophy (not empty ones). And happiness is part of a pleasurable life.

A common thread seems to be limits. Pains are limited. Desires are limited. But fears and desires can be unlimited... But that's not a positive thing. Are some fears justified or based in true perceptions and sensations? And we know Epicurus talks about the limits of pleasure. Is Epicurean philosophy at its root understanding all natural limits? That wouldn't be a goal but a means to maximizing pleasure.

My reason for laying all this out is to see what desires are akin to in Epicurus's writings to see what similarities we can find and how they relate to the Canon, pleasure, and other parts of the philosophy.

Post by "Godfrey" of September 12, 2020 at 12:33 AM

From this it appears that fears and desires are opposite mental constructs. But there are visceral fears and desires as well. I'm thinking that Epicurus might say at this point that everyone knows from experience what "fear" and "desire" mean; what we need to understand is how to work with them.

Which leads us to the quotes above and to "limits." As we live in a world of atoms and void, limits would be different for each of us. Not the definition, which we know from experience, but where a limit occurs. Would a limit then be the sweet spot at which one achieves maximum pleasure?

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2020 at 4:48 AM

I think that one real issue in discussing "limits" is that in English there is a connotation to "to limit" means "to reduce." And of course in discussing limits of pleasure, there is an inference that we draw from use of this term in discussing desires and pleasures that it would be a good thing for "pleasure" to necessarily be "reduced" -- and I don't think that was the intent of Epicurus at all.

First of all, "reduce" and "limit" aren't necessarily the same thing.

We've been distinguishing desires from pleasures, and it certainly makes more sense to "Reduce" desires than it does to "reduce" pleasure. In fact the supposed reason to reduce desire in the advice of Epicurus is in fact to **increase** pleasure.

We're making very useful observations about limits and their importance, but as we do so I think the elephant in the room that must be avoided is implying that by using the concept of limits (and I think limits are a concept) we not accept the stoic desire to see limits of pleasure or limits of desire as being chains that tie us down from experiencing the type of full pleasurable life that might otherwise be possible.

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2020 at 8:45 AM

Okay, to understand Epicurus's limits, we have to know what words he used. You knew this was coming, right?

Below are selections where English uses the word limit. I wanted to see if Epicurus consistently used the same or different words in the original. This is NOT an exhaustive list. If you're curious about a text not listed, just ask. The primary words Epicurus seems to use are *horizō* and *peras* and their variations. See below.

Fr. 548. Happiness and bliss are produced not by great riches nor vast possessions nor exalted occupations nor positions of power, but rather by peace of mind, freedom from pain, and a disposition of the soul that sets its limits in accordance with nature.

Fr. 548. τὸ εὐδαιμον καὶ μακάριον [happiness and blessedness] οὐ χρημάτων πλήθος οὐδὲ πραγμάτων ὄγκος οὐδ' ἀρχαί τινες ἔχουσιν οὐδὲ δυνάμεις, ἀλλ' ἀλυπία (alupia "no pain") καὶ πραότης παθῶν (praotēs pathōn "mildness/gentleness of the pathē) καὶ διάθεσις ψυχῆς [psychēs "soul, mind"] τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὀρίζουσα.

ὀρίζουσα (horizousa) < fem. participle of ὀρίζω (horizō) = to divide or separate from, as a boundary. (Note: This is the origin of English "horizon")

So to pare down that fragment: Happiness and bliss... are produced by peace of mind, freedom from pain, and a mind's disposition that sets its limits in accordance with nature.

PD 3. The limit of the magnitude of pleasure (is) the whole of the removal of that which causes pain. Where that which gives pleasure exists, during the time it is present, there is neither pain nor that which causes pain in body or mind nor either of these together.

PD 3. Ὅρος τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος ὑπεξαίρεσις. ὅπου δ' ἂν τὸ ἡδόμενον ἐνῆ, καθ' ὃν ἂν χρόνον ἦ, οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἀλγοῦν ἢ τὸ λυπούμενον ἢ τὸ συναμφοτέρον.

Ὅρος (horos) limit, rule, standard. A boundary or marker stone (compare horizō)

Horos and horizō are also used in PD 11 to state the limits of pains and desires, PD 15 to describe that "Nature's treasures have boundaries"

VS 25 uses horizō. Poverty is great wealth if measured by *the goals of nature* (tō tēs physeōs telei (< telos)) , and wealth is abject poverty if not limited (horizoumenos) by the goals of nature. ἡ πενία μετρομένη τῷ τῆς φύσεως τέλει μέγας ἐστὶ πλοῦτος· πλοῦτος δὲ μὴ ὀριζόμενος μεγάλη ἐστὶ πενία.

PD 10. If the objects which are productive of pleasures to profligate persons really freed them from fears of the mind—the fears, I mean, inspired by celestial and atmospheric phenomena, the fear of death, the fear of pain—if, further, they taught them to limit their desires, [then] we should not have any reason to censure such persons, for they would then be filled with pleasure to overflowing on all sides and would be exempt from all pain, whether of body or mind, that is, from all evil.

PD 10. Εἰ τὰ ποιητικὰ [τῶν περὶ τοὺς ἀσώτους ἡδονῶν] ἔλυε τοὺς φόβους τῆς διανοίας τοῦς [τε περὶ μετεώρων καὶ θανάτου καὶ ἀλγηδόνων], ἔτι τε "τὸ πέρασ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν" (to peras tōn epithumiōn "the end/extremity of desires") ἐδίδασκεν (taught), οὐκ ἂν ποτε εἶχομεν ὅ τι μεμψαίμεθα αὐτοῖς, πανταχόθεν ἐκπληρουμένοις τῶν ἡδονῶν καὶ οὐδαμόθεν οὔτε τὸ ἀλγοῦν οὔτε τὸ λυπούμενον ἔχουσιν, ὅ περ ἐστὶ τὸ κακόν.

πέρασ peras "end, limit, boundary, goal, that which comes to an end" Peras is sometimes opposed to archē "the beginning, origin" Note that pleasure is termed in one place by Epicurus as the archē and telos (goal, fulfillment) of the blessed life.

So now we have horizō and peras.

Peras is the word used in PD 18 in "The limit of pleasure in the mind is obtained by calculating the pleasures themselves and the contrary pains, which cause the mind the greatest alarms."

PD 19 is interesting! Check it out!

Infinite and finite time afford equal pleasure, if one measures its limits by reason.

19 Ὁ ἄπειρος χρόνος ἴσην ἔχει τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ ὁ πεπερασμένος, εἴαν τις αὐτῆς τὰ πέρατα καταμετρήσῃ τῷ λογισμῷ.

Peras (in plural πέρατα perata) is the word used for "measure its limits". But check out the word for infinite ἄπειρος apeiros < a + peras!! "No end"! The word literally means "it never ends".

Perata again used in PD 20: The flesh assumes the *limits* of pleasure to be infinite, and only infinite time would satisfy it. But the mind, grasping in thought what the end (telos) and *limit* of the flesh is, and banishing the terrors of futurity, procures a complete and perfect life and has no longer any need of infinite time.

Again in PD 21: the limits of life (ta perata tou biou)

These are some of the peras synonyms given by Woodhouse, S. C. (1910) English-Greek Dictionary A Vocabulary of the Attic Language:

accomplishment, bound, cessation, completion, conclusion, culmination, finality, finish, fulfilment, goal, measure, period.

It seems to imply something that has a natural boundary or that has come to some natural end or has been determined to have a boundary (had a boundary marker set).

Consider too the Greek preposition Peri "around" (e.g., perimeter).

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2020 at 8:53 AM

Great work assembling that! Thanks! Of course what you're saying in the final analysis is that Epicurus did not use the same word when describing all these different situations, so it is dangerous and really improper of us to use the same word in those instances without noting that the meaning is different.

It's almost as if "limit" in English came to be a fetish and got overused for too many cases, especially when over the same years its primary meaning as a verb came to be thought of as "to reduce" more so than "set a boundary."

Of course over those same years the primary religion was Christianity and the primary philosophy was some form of Platonism / Stoicism.

I am *sure* that there's no coincidence that all those things were taking place over the same period 😊

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2020 at 9:34 AM

Good points, [Cassius](#) .

I will say that Epicurus does tell Pythokles to ἀφάρει (aphairei) his desires if he wants to be rich.

The verb means "take away, set aside" and is used in mathematics for "subtract." Similar to "limit" but with different - and possibly significant - shades of meaning.

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2020 at 12:02 PM

Absolutely no doubt that some of us -- maybe a lot of us - need to "reduce" certain desires that bring us pain. On the other hand many of us - lots of us - need to ratchet up our desires in those areas that would really bring us pleasure before we face the eternity of death. It's all in the circumstances, but darn it, just like some people want tot dwell on "painlessness" because they are hurting so badly, similarly some want to dwell on "reduction" because they have foolishly targeted their time. In both cases they project their problems on everyone and then proclaim that "everyone" should reduce their desires / pleasures. I think we can intelligently deal with this without making a rhetorical mistake on either side, but I know -- or at least I sense -- which side the danger is on in the field of Epicurean "evangelism." 😊

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2020 at 1:57 PM

For me, it all goes back to Epicurus teaching us to "Ask this question of every desire: what will happen to me if the object of desire is achieved, and what if not?" (VS 71)

It's not about specifically going out to increase or decrease desires. Which desires are you going to try to achieve and which ones are you going to let go. If the feeling of pleasure is your guide, you're going to work to achieve those desires that will bring you a pleasurable, blessed life. If you don't examine your desires and just let your life be "one damn thing after another" you may experience pleasure or pain but you are at the mercy of Fortune and chance. Why would you want to leave your one precious existence up to chance?

It comes back to the boundary markers. We have limited time. The desires we can achieve and the pleasurable experiences we can have are finite. The kinds of desires that will lead to a pleasurable life are not infinite. All pleasure is good, all pain is bad. But that doesn't mean we set out to experience every pleasure nor shun every pain. With pleasure as our North Star, we can "limit" our desires to those that will get us through life most pleasurably. There are innumerable paths we can take through life. Pleasure gives us a goal by which to choose a path.

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2020 at 2:29 PM

Very very well stated Don. It seems so obvious! And yet, here we are in a corner of the internet while every academically-trained student or teacher is teaching or studying something much different than that. I suppose it would be helpful to diagnosis how we got here, but probably the first order of business is to stop the bleeding and look first to the development of a stable community of people who see things differently, and are willing to stand up for that position.

Sometimes I feel like hoisting a pirate flag and adopting some kind of "'men' without a country" imagery 😊

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2020 at 2:32 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Very very well stated Don. It seems so obvious! And yet, here we are in a corner of the internet while every academically-trained student or teacher is teaching or studying something much different than that. I suppose it would be helpful to diagnosis how we got here, but probably the first order of business is to stop the bleeding and look first to the development of a stable community of people who see things differently, and are willing to stand up for that position.

Sometimes I feel like hoisting a pirate flag and adopting some kind of "'men' without a country" imagery 😊

i hope you still approve. I added a little more just as you were posting 😊

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2020 at 5:33 PM

Yes I do still approve. The wording we are looking for in english is more like "set the parameters" or "define the target" or even "Triangulate" -- still missing the best term. We're looking to define the playing field, or the rules of the game, so that we can then know best how to play the game.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 12, 2020 at 6:19 PM

"Find the sweet spot" for maximum pleasure? Pretty slangy though. "Define the target" and "triangulate" seem like they're on the right track.... Something along the lines of "apex" or "peak" in the sense that on one side is not enough and on the other side is too much. "Optimum?"

I just Googled "sweet spot synonyms:" sweet spot definitely won't do lol! 😬

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2020 at 6:42 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I just Googled "sweet spot synonyms:" sweet spot definitely won't do lol! 😬

LOL!!

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2020 at 7:44 PM

Unfortunately what mostly come to mind are trendy slang words, like "right-size" -- but that doesn't do it either! 😬

To make matters worse, what comes next are those cat videos where cats squeeze themselves into boxes and glass bowls to fill every inch!

Our minds are hopelessly polluted!