

Can you seek happiness and be full of joy when there is a war in Europe? Wes Cecil podcast.

Post by “Marco” of May 15, 2022 at 4:06 AM

Can you seek happiness and be full of joy when there is a war in Europe? Do you also have to be in pain and suffer? Professor Wes Cecil has all kinds of loose thoughts from Epicurus, the Christian ethics, Spinoza and he seeks answers. His division between happiness / pleasure / joy is perhaps just a matter of words and translation. His avoidance of pain according to Epicurus reminds me of Cassius' vessel.

Wes Cecil does not give definitive answers here, but brings material to think about.

Googel translate.

Image not found or type unknown



[Ethics of Joy](#)

The next video in the ethics in the modern world series. A reflection on our pose of unhappiness and sense of the seriousness of the world. www.wescecil.com
[youtu.be](#)

Post by “Cassius” of May 15, 2022 at 8:33 AM

I haven't had time to read the article but in response to the topic question, it's according to Epicurus surely "yes you can seek happiness" but perhaps "can you be full of joy" is more difficult. Being 100% "full of joy" might be analytically only something that an Epicurean god can theoretically achieve in the intermundia, because we always have aches and pains that technically prevent us from being "full."

But Epicurus' last statement about the pleasure he was able to achieve even during the process of dying from a painful disease would be an example that as long as we are alive we can always seek and hope to achieve some amount of pleasure, even if it is only pleasant memories.

So it would be my view that the topic question:

Can you seek happiness and be full of joy when there is XXXX?

Would almost always be answered "yes" from an Epicurean perspective. The only exception I can think of would be those situations where you decide that death is preferable to living on, and even in those situations you are still using a pleasure/pain analysis to guide your decision.

I think that's the real "wrong answer" implied by the question -- it's implying that there is some standard of conduct (implicitly religious or humanistic or in some way absolute) to which you must conform that overrides the pleasure/pain calculation under XXXX circumstances.

Post by “Godfrey” of May 15, 2022 at 12:57 PM

This can be analyzed per the ethics of choices and avoidances based on pleasure and pain. In some cases we choose pain, with the intention of greater pleasure to follow. Exercise is a common example. What is notable is that the painful experience is instrumental to achieving pleasure.

While it's natural to feel pain when others are suffering, ceasing to seek pleasure will only diminish one's own efficacy. So I would say that it's actually necessary to continue to seek pleasure. That's the basis of our ethics: if we throw that out, we have nothing to guide us.

If we're in a position to help others who are suffering, then we can choose certain pains with the expectation achieving the pleasures of successfully helping them. If we're not in a position to help them, seeking out pain is basically pointless.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 15, 2022 at 12:59 PM

I found this podcast to be very good. He says: that if you are feeling pain of some kind then it will be difficult to feel joy (defined as your "native vitality") -- and this why Epicurus recommended the removal of pain. Very good points given with regard to Epicureanism. Also he said something along the lines: if you enjoy drinking, then drink as much as you want, but you really don't want to give yourself a hang-over. And other interesting points about why our culture looks down on the feeling of joy, while exulting hard work and stress in life.

Post by “Marco” of May 15, 2022 at 3:57 PM

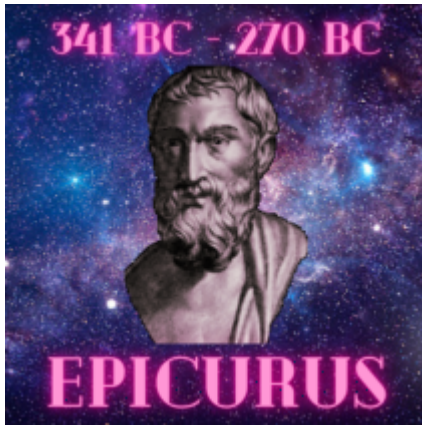
Kalosyni, live action shot from his lecture, with his Epicurus shirt.



Post by “Kalosyni” of May 15, 2022 at 5:15 PM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2517-can-you-seek-happiness-and-be-full-of-joy-when-there-is-a-war-in-europe-wes-ceci/>

Seeing this photo gives me an idea that we could sell hoodies and t-shirts which say "EpicureanFriends.com" on the back side, and maybe it could have this logo I just made on the front --



-- and could also make with blue lettering instead of pink.

Post by "Don" of May 15, 2022 at 6:17 PM

I've always thought a clip of just Epicurus's eyes from one of the famous portraits or busts sandwiched between

SFO

(eyes)

TSE

would make an interesting Tshirt design with small print of Sic fac omnia tamquam spectet Epicurus on top and Do all things as if Epicurus were watching one the bottom

Then EpicurueanFriends.com on the back?

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 17, 2022 at 8:39 AM

[Quote from Marco](#)

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2517-can-you-seek-happiness-and-be-full-of-joy-when-there-is-a-war-in-europe-wes-ceci/>

Can you seek happiness and be full of joy when there is a war in Europe?

I have still been pondering this question. Also, because it applies to anything in life, as [Cassius](#) wrote: "Can you seek happiness and be full of joy when there is XXXX?"

Being that I live in the US, it feels like the war in Europe is very far away, and I do not personally know anyone affected by it. There have been many wars all through history, and also civil wars and coups in some places in third-world countries (which get much less attention).

Early on, my initial first reaction about what was happening in Ukraine was that I had to readjust my idea (my mental concept) of "world stability" - so observing this happen, the human mind has a way of evaluating the safety of the present moment and the anticipated future. If we feel safe then we can much more easily seek happiness. If we can trust that the world will still be safe then we can relax again.

For people who are directly affected by or living in areas of unrest, it would make more sense to be somber and pay attention, to what is happening, to stay alive. So in some sense happiness and joy are a product of peace. It would not be safe to spend too much time "seeking happiness" in an unsafe environment.

So now why are there those who are living in peace and safety unhappy?

Maybe they worry about war in an abstract sense, or they feel that any suffering in the world should not happen (the above podcast briefly brings up this idea).

There are also other things in life to worry about: one's own financial stability, job stability, or family stability. I think that is why it is important to work through one's personal issues with regard to worries in life. For without a sense of having one's basic needs met, it will be difficult to seek happiness.

The idea of "seeking happiness" also is something to investigate. In the podcast Wes Cecil says that we have a kind of "innate joy" or "native joy" that we can tap into. He gives the example of this joy with the image of two dogs playing and chasing each other - they are completely happy in their play. Also it is just paying attention to the good things in life, and the sweet things in life. So "seeking happiness" / "seeking joy" is easy to do -- provided that one's life is stable.

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2022 at 9:51 AM

I agree with what Kalosyni wrote.

Also:

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

So in some sense happiness and joy are a product of peace. It would not be safe to spend too much time "seeking happiness" in an unsafe environment.

And in other cases happiness and joy can be the product of war, if under the circumstances war is necessary to obtain or preserve the peace.

My point to emphasize would be that in the end there is nothing - not even "peace" which is desirable in and of itself other than pleasure, and everything else has to be considered a contextual tool that may or may not be appropriate to choose at a particular moment.

"Ultimately" the goal is pleasure, but at any particular moment our context may demand that we choose actions that are for the moment painful.

Post by "Godfrey" of May 17, 2022 at 3:39 PM

Quote from Kalosyni

It would not be safe to spend too much time "seeking happiness" in an unsafe environment.

Have we ever pinned down concrete definitions of happiness, joy and pleasure? I ask this because my reaction to this specific quote is that it's even more necessary to seek pleasure and avoid pain in an unsafe environment. It's just that the desires involved would focus intently on the natural and necessary: safety, shelter, food, etc.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

So now why are there those who are living in peace and safety unhappy?

This, too, comes down to desires: have these people seen to their financial, job and family stability? Have they embraced an effective personal philosophy? Are they pursuing unnatural and/or unnecessary desires?

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2022 at 5:32 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I ask this because my reaction to this specific quote is that it's even more necessary to seek pleasure and avoid pain in an unsafe environment.

Yes I think you've pointed out the issue in Kalosyni's original wording.

From the highest-level point of view, our orientation is that we are ALWAYS seek to obtain pleasure and avoid pain.

The issue is that from the moment-to-moment point of view we can and often do choose pain so as to obtain a greater pleasure, or to avoid a worse pain.

This is the continuing problem of labels like "hedonism" and accepting the negative stereotype that the Epicurean is going to be a slacker and pursue momentary or lesser pleasures rather than to undergo the pain and effort that are often required to obtain more important goals. Epicurus makes very clear that that is not true, but calling him a "hedonist" or a "pleasure-seeker" obscures the big picture given the corruption of the language.

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2022 at 6:04 PM

Call it a definitional issue or philosophical issue or just call it a word game if you must, but this has got to be one of our key challenges. How do we make this so clear that the terminology becomes second nature?

There is NEVER any goal that is a goal in itself other than pleasure, and there is no contradiction in at the same time saying that we sometimes choose pain in order to achieve pleasure.

This confusion is at the root of so much confusion.

As we've just seen in going through AFDIA, people get attracted to "pleasure" but they often never shake the premise that they came in with - they think there is something higher than pleasure which has to steer the ship toward some other goal to save us from ourselves and from overindulgence.

The philosophical boil has to be popped:. We sometimes choose pain in our daily activities due to circumstances, but our goal in making every choice and avoidance decision is always pleasure.

Maybe it helps to reduce pleasure and pain to "feeling" and simply say that it is feeling that makes life worthwhile. Yes we sometimes make choices that cause temporary annoyances to our feelings, but we can't ever lose sight that it is for the sake of our best "feeling" that we do everything.

What we don't feel is, like death, nothing to us.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2022 at 6:16 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The philosophical boil has to be popped:

Well, there's a mental image! 🤔 But I see where you're coming from.

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2022 at 7:01 PM

Yes a very poor mental image :-). We need one better for lancing the boil, and a better term than "hedonist". At the very least a modifier for it, but since hedone isn't even an original English word we need to do better.

This far we are at "Epicurean" but that doesn't advance the goal toward being self-explanatory.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 17, 2022 at 9:18 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And in other cases happiness and joy can be the product of war, if under the circumstances war is necessary to obtain or preserve the peace.

Something about this statement doesn't sit with me well. But maybe it is right up there with: humans kill animals for food and eating them gives us life. The level of abstraction has missing pieces. It may take me several more days to ponder this.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 17, 2022 at 9:26 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Have we ever pinned down concrete definitions of happiness, joy and pleasure?

I think it would be a good idea to have definitions.

For now I see that this thread is causing me to think about the meaning of the word "pleasure" and how I understand it.

The "pleasure of relief" in my mind is not pleasure - it is just relief.

Pleasure is for bodily sensations.

Enjoyment is for mental sensations.

My mind is too tired tonight, and I want to come back to this tomorrow, because this thread brings up issues that I think are of primary importance.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2022 at 9:30 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And in other cases happiness and joy can be the product of war, if under the circumstances war is necessary to obtain or preserve the peace.

Something about this statement doesn't sit with me well. But maybe it is right up there with: humans kill animals for food and eating them gives us life. The level of abstraction has missing pieces. It may take me several more days to ponder this.

It strikes me (literally at first blush) that that statement has an echo of "we can only experience pleasure if we go through pain."

Happiness and joy are not the product of war. I'll give you that undergoing the pain of conflict may be necessary to obtain or preserve peace, but I wouldn't phrase it as happiness and joy are the "product of war." It may be necessary to endure the pain of war, but war does not "produce" happiness. The end of war may allow the environment in which happiness may be found, but I'd be careful about using produced or product. That implies causation.

I don't know if I'd be able to do it, but, theoretically, pleasure can be found in small things during a war with the right perspective... Even if it is as small as "I'm still alive to live tomorrow. I can still feel." Pleasure is emphatically not always the big joyful feeling. It can be as small as taking pleasure in breathing, feeling the breathe in and out.

Post by “Godfrey” of May 17, 2022 at 9:37 PM

"Epicurean ethics are defined by prudent choices and avoidances, which are guided by the feelings of pleasure and pain." That's an unwieldy first stab at popping the boil with a very blunt instrument. 😞

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2022 at 9:39 PM

Plus there is great pleasure in defeating your enemy - not something we would immediately look kindly on in polite company, but there nevertheless.

I think we once again have to separate pleasure as an ultimate goal, which we wouldn't generally pursue through a life of war, with the pleasures that can come through most any activity that is not always and every moment painful. And as much as we might want to call it

that, many people do get great pleasure in war - at least when they are winning - just like boxers and others who fight for a living (all competitive sports?) Find it very exhilarating - again at least in some moments.

Post by “Godfrey” of May 17, 2022 at 9:42 PM

War also reduces pleasure and pain to the more primitive animal or newborn levels of basic survival. They're still guides, but the pleasures are not what we might normally think of when we think of pleasure.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2022 at 9:43 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The "pleasure of relief" in my mind is not pleasure - it is just relief.

Pleasure is for bodily sensations.

Enjoyment is for mental sensations

I would suggest "the feelings are two: pleasure and pain." Everything we feel is either pleasure or pain. It may be mild or intense, but it's either pleasure or pain. Relief is pleasure. Anxiety is pain. Enjoyment is pleasure. Happiness is pleasure. Aponia, ataraxia, khara (joy, exultation) , euphrosyne (mirth, good cheer, merriment), etc. are all pleasure. Take any "feeling" and it will fall somewhere on the scale of pleasure or pain. Even equilibrium or homeostasis is pleasure according to Epicurus. I personally am becoming more convinced that that is exactly what aponia and ataraxia are.

Post by “Cassius” of May 17, 2022 at 9:44 PM

"but I wouldn't phrase it as happiness and joy are the "product of war."

My main clarification in this point is that I would not say (and don't think I did) that they are ALWAYS the product of war but pleasure CAN BE the product of war and of many other things that we find generally disreputable.

The test is always in the consequences, because if a thing in fact generates any degree of pleasure, it is pleasurable at least for that moment. Maybe not a wise idea at all, but the proof of whether any pleasure is generated is in the actual result for the time that pleasure is generated, rather than all the ultimate consequences of pain which may or may not occur later.

Post by "Don" of May 17, 2022 at 10:50 PM

Hmm... I'm not sure I follow your reasoning, although it wouldn't be the first time we've talked past each other. So I'll prattle on myself.

When I read "X is the product of war" I read that as "War is necessary for X."

I think I understand what you're saying about ALWAYS and CAN BE, but I read that as making it possible to say, "I want to feel pleasure so I'll go to war." or "War gives me pleasure."

Some people may feel pleasurable feelings while fighting a war, but, overall, I would have to posit that war is not a choice-worthy source of pleasure because you are putting yourself in danger of being killed and other - let's say - hazards. And, yes, I'm judging whether someone's pursuit of pleasure is choiceworthy or not in this case. I think I have precedent for that from Epicurus himself.

Even on the side of the one who does not choose war but has war thrust upon them, war does not "produce" pleasure. Here's how I'm playing out that scenario in my head (*Oh, save me Zeus! I'm going down the road of hypotheticals!!!*)

- Let's say my life is stable, comfortable, overall pleasurable with episodes now and again of pain.
- Something happens and I have to defend my home and family from hostile forces... I'm now in a war.
- My life is now unstable, dangerous, with an overall abundance of pain with small episodes of pleasure.
- I am fighting a war to return peace and stability to my life so I can again have a life that is stable, comfortable, and has more pleasure than pain. I did not choose to fight this war, but I now have no choice but to engage in war.

- My side wins the war. I can piece my life back together hopefully and find more pleasure than pain in my existence.

So, given this scenario, I would not say the "pleasure" I feel after the war is a "product" of the war. I felt pleasure for fleeting moments while fighting the war. I will hopefully feel more pleasure as a result of the absence of conflict and a return to peace and stability. But the war did not "produce" pleasure. It may have created an environment conducive to experiencing feelings of pleasure more likely, but I'm just having problems with that phrasing of produce and product.

PS. I reread [Cassius](#) 's post in the light of morning and pulled this out:

Quote

The test is always in the consequences, because if a thing in fact generates any degree of pleasure, it is pleasurable at least for that moment. Maybe not a wise idea at all, but the proof of whether any pleasure is generated is in the actual result for the time that pleasure is generated, rather than all the ultimate consequences of pain which may or may not occur later.

I think we're saying similar things here and in my paragraph that starts "Some people may feel pleasurable feelings while fighting a war..." Here I'm thinking of mercenaries and those who feel pleasure in the sense of power (I'm assuming) they feel engaging in battle. Maybe even those who are "fighting for a cause" although this latter may fall in my bullet points. Although I still maintain that mercenary pleasure isn't choice worthy for the same reason endless strings of drinking parties are not choiceworthy.

Post by “Don” of May 17, 2022 at 11:38 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I've always thought a clip of just Epicurus's eyes from one of the famous portraits or busts sandwiched between

SFO

(eyes)

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would make an interesting Tshirt design with small print of Sic fac omnia tamquam spectet Epicurus on top and Do all things as if Epicurus were watching one the bottom

Then EpicurueanFriends.com on the back?

S F O T S E



SIC FAC OMNIA TAMQUAM SPECTET EPICURUS

A VERY ROUGH draft of the idea using a public

domain image.

Post by “Joshua” of May 18, 2022 at 9:07 AM

I can't believe I didn't think of this earlier.

First Snow in Alsace

by Richard Wilbur

The snow came down last night like moths

Burned on the moon; it fell till dawn,

Covered the town with simple cloths.

Absolute snow lies rumped on

What shellbursts scattered and deranged,

Entangled railings, crevassed lawn.

As if it did not know they'd changed,

Snow smoothly clasps the roofs of homes

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2517-can-you-seek-happiness-and-be-full-of-joy-when-there-is-a-war-in-europe-wes-ceci/>

Fear-gutted, trustless and estranged.
The ration stacks are milky domes;
Across the ammunition pile
The snow has climbed in sparkling combs.
You think: beyond the town a mile
Or two, this snowfall fills the eyes
Of soldiers dead a little while.
Persons and persons in disguise,
Walking the new air white and fine,
Trade glances quick with shared surprise.
At children's windows, heaped, benign,
As always, winter shines the most,
And frost makes marvelous designs.
The night guard coming from his post,
Ten first-snows back in thought, walks slow
And warms him with a boyish boast:
He was the first to see the snow.

Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2022 at 10:46 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

"I want to feel pleasure so I'll go to war." or "War gives me pleasure."

I think we're pretty much on the same page after reading the recent posts.

I think the issues that arise in discussing things like this is mainly a matter of keeping multiple contexts in mind.

Those two statements of course as written without additional context would be highly unlikely to make sense in most cases.

But since everything is a "case" more than a "rule" even those two could be tied to a context and make sense:

"I want to continue to feel pleasure at living under the Roman Republic so I will participate in assassinating Julius Caesar and go to war against Anthony and Octavian." (That would be something I could easily hear Cassius Longinus saying, given his letters to Cicero justifying his Epicurean beliefs, but as always when discussing the Roman Civil War there seem to be a lot of things going on beneath the surface so I am not really sure whose side I would take if I had been there)

"War against the Persians will lead to great pleasure if I am able to save Sparta and Greece." (I could hear Leonidas saying something like that prior to Thermopylae.)

But really at this point there's probably nothing further to be accomplished in illustrating the point. As usual I think we're basically at the same position. The interesting point that we can file away for the future is the extent to which illustrations like this are helpful in the "teaching" aspect of Epicurean philosophy. For the same reason that we discussed it we probably do need good examples of the point that only "pleasure" itself is ALWAYS a desirable feeling (because our nature presents itself to us that way).

That means everything else (even the **choice** to pursue a particular pleasure at a particular moment) has to be evaluated contextually.

And I don't think we are just playing with words. I think the clear articulation of these issues has to come before we can clearly understand it or express the point to others.

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 18, 2022 at 11:30 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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desirable feeling (because our nature presents itself to us that way.

That means everything else (even the ****choice**** to pursue a particular pleasure at a particular moment) has to be evaluated contextually.

And I don't think we are just playing with words. I think the clear articulation of these issues has to come before we can clearly understand it or express the point to others.

Cassius, I think you are opening it up to a wider vision which takes in account all of human history. If we come back to our present modern time, we now have democracy and it's accompanying military system. The common person doesn't consider these kinds of questions. As you have brought all this up, I find it to be helpful in that it has me thinking in a broader scope.

Generally I don't think much on the ethics of these issues, war, etc, etc. (I do often find that I feel a certain resistance to the very topic of "war"). And also, thank you [Marco](#) for bringing up this topic and posting the podcast.

For me, my main focus here on the forum is for simple choices in life. The Epicurean philosophy presents a way of paying attention to pleasure, and making enjoyment of life a meaningful and worthy focus -- because we believe that we have just this life and no after-life or reincarnation.

For myself, I still need to spend more time with "unpacking" words and ideas dealing with "pleasure", "enjoyment", "happiness", "joy", especially because now our current modern cultural understanding of the word "pleasure" is very narrow. It think it will also continue to be an issue for others as well.

Post by "Don" of May 18, 2022 at 11:46 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

our current modern cultural understanding of the word "pleasure" is very narrow.

I wonder if that's a problem with the word or with the current cultural understanding. Personally, I'd say the latter. For me, putting "pleasure" in the context of "pleasure/pain" is helpful in getting past the semantic baggage of conceiving "pleasure" as simply a "hedonistic" elated feeling. Pleasure encompasses everything we feel that isn't painful or causes us pain. "Simple" as that. 😊 That's why Epicurus could claim (and rightly from my perspective) that homeostasis and equilibrium are pleasurable.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 18, 2022 at 11:49 AM

Here is the definition of the word "pleasure" that comes up at the top of the page with a Google search:

noun

a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment.

"she smiled with pleasure at being praised"

synonyms: happiness, delight, joy, gladness, rapture, glee, satisfaction, gratification, fulfillment, contentment, contentedness, enjoyment, amusement, delectation

adjective

used or intended for entertainment rather than business.

"pleasure boats"

verb

give sexual enjoyment or satisfaction to.

"tell me what will pleasure you"

Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2022 at 12:30 PM

1 - yes credit for this topic goes to Marco, not to me... I just added the pedantic word playing



2 - Kalosynis view of the definition is the common one, yet to understand the philosophy we have to use the broader one that Epicurus was using. That makes it necessary to speak to both types of people and practice being understood to both.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 18, 2022 at 12:31 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

view of the definition is the common one, yet to understand the philosophy we have to use the broader one that Epicurus was using

I believe that given some time I can solve this "problem" 😊

Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2022 at 3:32 PM

Kalosyni's post causes me to continue beating the poor dead horse by an image that Joshua's post evokes:

[Quote from Joshua](#)

First Snow in Alsace

by Richard Wilbur

The snow came down last night like moths

Burned on the moon; it fell till dawn,

Covered the town with simple cloths.

Absolute snow lies rumped on

What shellbursts scattered and deranged,

Entangled railings, crevassed lawn.

Display More

The picture I now have in my mind to double down on the point is thinking of those poor devils in the trenches fighting WW1 (I'm not sure where Alsace is but I'll take it as close enough to the trench warfare area).

Even if I were huddled down in a trench in miserable cold and wet conditions keeping my head down and listening to shellbursts exploding overhead, I submit an Epicurean in that position should still look at every moment by moment decision using the same criteria I would if I were at a banquet in Paris:

Every decision every moment comes down to the same issue: By what standards do we make our decisions. Even in the trench an inch or a second away from possible death, the answer is the same: Every decision is weighed by the same question: "What will happen to me if I make this choice? Will this choice bring me greater pleasure or greater pain?"

Or as stated in the Vatican Sayings:

[VS71](#). Every desire must be confronted by this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished, and what if it is not?

I don't think that's limited to "every desire" in the sense of choosing from vanilla vs chocolate ice cream. It's the ultimate question that has to be automatized and used as rigorously as you can to optimize every second of your life.

EDIT: the ultimate question.... as opposed to:

"What would God want me to do?"

"What would I do if I were a virtuous person?"

"What would logic and reason alone (if I were a Vulcan like Mr Spock) tell me to do?"

Post by "Kalosyni" of May 18, 2022 at 5:18 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Let's say my life is stable, comfortable, overall pleasurable with episodes now and again of pain.

Something happens and I have to defend my home and family from hostile forces... I'm now in a war.

My life is now unstable, dangerous, with an overall abundance of pain with small episodes of pleasure.

I am fighting a war to return peace and stability to my life so I can again have a life that is stable, comfortable, and has more pleasure than pain. I did not choose to fight this war, but I now have no choice but to engage in war.

My side wins the war. I can piece my life back together hopefully and find more pleasure than pain in my existence.

In my mind survival does not equal pleasure. Survival does not guarantee pleasure. Don's quote is applicable even in other situations -- For example, someone getting into a career requiring

long stressful hours of work, and then transitioning into a different line of work which is less stressful.

The drive for survival is not the same as the pursuit of enjoyment in life. In survival we want to eliminate pain, in enjoyment we are adding in pleasure.

These are all nuances, and interesting to talk about.

Post by “Cassius” of May 18, 2022 at 5:24 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

These are all nuances, and interesting to talk about.

Yes, right, because we sometimes choose not to survive if the cost in pain in our view would be too great.

Survival itself is valuable only to the extent that it would lead to more pleasure than pain.

So I think we're agreeing that any goal to "survive" is a valuable goal only to the extent that we think it will lead to more pleasure than pain.

I wonder if it was for reasons like this that Nietzsche went for a "will to power" rather than "will to survive." Of course I think there's lots of other opinion out there on how "survival" may be the automatic goal that kicks in instinctively, but that "survival for the sake of survival" isn't on many philosophers' list of good ideas, unless the survival lead to something else (in Epicurus' case pleasure).

Post by “reneliza” of May 20, 2022 at 10:35 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

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I am fighting a war to return peace and stability to my life so I can again have a life that is stable, comfortable, and has more pleasure than pain. I did not choose to fight this war, but I now have no choice but to engage in war.

My side wins the war. I can piece my life back together hopefully and find more pleasure than pain in my existence.

In my mind survival does not equal pleasure. Survival does not guarantee pleasure. Don's quote is applicable even in other situations -- For example, someone getting into a career requiring long stressful hours of work, and then transitioning into a different line of work which is less stressful.

The drive for survival is not the same as the pursuit of enjoyment in life. In survival we want to eliminate pain, in enjoyment we are adding in pleasure.

These are all nuances, and interesting to talk about.

If Pleasure and Pain are mutually exhaustive (ie all experiences are pleasure or pain) then the elimination of pain must be a pleasure.

I'm not sure if there's anything in the text that spells this out explicitly, but this is how I understand the "limit" conversation. Once you eliminate all pain, that's the limit of pleasure because everything left over IS pleasure (if it's not pain it is by definition pleasure)

I drew out a sketch to try to further understand this myself - similar to the concept of the vessel. If we think of life as pleasure, pain, and neutral, then just removing pain doesn't reach the limit of pleasure. But if you realize that there is pleasure in anything that is not pain (yes, even organizing a sock drawer), then there is no neutral, so what is left over when pain is removed is all pleasure

In the picture, the bright pink represents more intense or active pleasures and the pale pink represents passive pleasures, with white representing "neutral." Which circle is the most pink? Except for the first one, they are all at the limit of pinkness. Darker pink is not more or less pink than lighter pink. They're both pleasure, the difference is just the shade.

Post by "Don" of May 20, 2022 at 10:42 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2517-can-you-seek-happiness-and-be-full-of-joy-when-there-is-a-war-in-europe-wes-ceci/>

[reneliza](#) I think you're analysis is spot on and well articulated. 👍 👍

Post by “Cassius” of May 20, 2022 at 10:57 AM

Agree with Don - spot on, and a useful chart and description as well.

I would add as further explanation that your description (*"In the picture, the bright pink represents more intense or active pleasures and the pale pink represents passive pleasures, with white representing "neutral." Which circle is the most pink? Except for the first one, they are all at the limit of pinkness. Darker pink is not more or less pink than lighter pink. They're both pleasure, the difference is just the shade."*) is necessary for understanding the point of the chart.

I don't think that a person looking at the chart without explanation would conclude that "except for the first one, all are at the limit of pinkness." Without "explanation" (which comes through philosophy) I think most people would say that the top right circle is the "most pink" because they would be automatically be looking at the darkness (intensity) and fullness (purity) of the color in the circle as making it "most pink."

However, with the explanation, which I agree makes sense by explaining that "pink" includes all shades of pink, the chart conveys exactly the point which is intended: that the "limit of pleasure" does not mean "the most intense pleasure possible" but in fact means a state in which pleasure cannot be increased BY DEFINITION.

I would say that the essential point here is that you are showing the LOGIC of statements such as:

[PD03](#). The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once.

But even more importantly and helpfully, this helps with the explanation of 18, 19, and 20, because it is the logical /philosophical "reasoned understanding" and the "measuring, by reason, the limits of pleasure," and "the mind, having attained a reasoned understanding" which enable us to understand the point. There's the other citation to the point that not everyone is capable of figuring out the problem, and this is the reason we need Epicurean philosophy, because we can't "feel" our way to a reasoned understanding that full life does not require an infinite time:

[PD18](#). The pleasure in the flesh is not increased when once the pain due to want is removed, but is only varied: and the limit as regards pleasure in the mind is begotten by the reasoned understanding of these very pleasures, and of the emotions akin to them, which used to cause the greatest fear to the mind.

[PD19](#). Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures, by reason, the limits of pleasure.

[PD20](#). The flesh perceives the limits of pleasure as unlimited, and unlimited time is required to supply it. But the mind, having attained a reasoned understanding of the ultimate good of the flesh and its limits, and having dissipated the fears concerning the time to come, supplies us with the complete life, and we have no further need of infinite time; but neither does the mind shun pleasure, nor, when circumstances begin to bring about the departure from life, does it approach its end as though it fell short, in any way, of the best life.

So that takes us back to the point I will argue relentlessly, that PD3 and referring to the "limit of quantity of pleasure" the references in Menoeceus to pleasure being equal to absence of pain are not a call to asceticism.

Instead, they are a call to a reasoned understanding of how in fact it does make sense to see "Pleasure" as the goal of life, in contrast to "virtue" or "piety" or "meaningfulness" or whatever else anyone wants to suggest. Unless those bring pleasure, they are worthless.

Post by “Don” of May 20, 2022 at 11:08 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"pink" includes all shades of pink

I like that, too.

So, by definition: "Pleasure" includes all shades of pleasure in this analysis (which I think is the right one).

Which then follows on that where there is pleasure, there is not pain.

So, it's not the "removal of pain" that is the focus - as some commentators (and academics) want to do. The addition of pleasure **IS** the removal of pain ONLY because the two can't co-exist. Where there is pleasure, there is not pain. It is the addition of more pleasure - putting the

focus on pleasure - that makes a statement the following possible...

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once.

Bah! I'm just prattling on like Epicurus at the end of Book 28! 😊 [reneliza](#) did a much better job and was much more succinct!

Post by “Cassius” of May 20, 2022 at 11:23 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

The addition of pleasure **IS** the removal of pain ONLY because the two can't co-exist. Where there is pleasure, there is not pain.

Yes and I think that's pretty close to the intersection of the feeling / intellectual issue. We can feel that pleasure and pain can't co-exist, because we by experience feel only one of the other at a time.

However unless we "think about" and "reason through" the issue, and identify by definition that there are only two feelings (all good feelings are "pleasure" and all bad feelings as "pain") and then we go forward and realize intellectually that this means that "pleasure and pain" can't co-exist, then we're not in a position to extend these findings to their logical conclusions.

We (most of us) won't be able to identify that it is reasonable to say that "pleasure" can be "full" in the bottom left and bottom right circles that ReneLiza has identified as also fully pink/pleasure. We will think instead that in order to have a full life we have to go for the top right circle, or even to keep darkening that circle or changing its shades on and on and on, never stopping, when we should realize all along that as long as the white/pain is gone, the circle is fully "pink."

In this a word game? Yes. Does it *fully* satisfy us when we get old and we want to keep living forever? *Probably not*. But does it help us realize that no matter how long we stay on the treadmill of time we can't improve the experience of running full speed on that treadmill? I think so, yes.

DeWitt's mountaintop analogy is probably more attractive than comparing life to a "treadmill." Even with a mountaintop, which we all generally see as "good," no matter how long we stay at

the summit of the mountain the experience really doesn't get any better after we've looked around for a relatively short while.

Post by “reneliza” of May 20, 2022 at 12:28 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I don't think that a person looking at the chart without explanation would conclude that "except for the first one, all are at the limit of pinkness." Without "explanation" (which comes through philosophy) I think most people would say that the top right circle is the "most pink" because they would be automatically be looking at the darkness (intensity) and fullness (purity) of the color in the circle as making it "most pink."

However, with the explanation, which I agree makes sense by explaining that "pink" includes all shades of pink, the chart conveys exactly the point which is intended: that the "limit of pleasure" does not mean "the most intense pleasure possible" but in fact means a state in which pleasure cannot be increased BY DEFINITION.

I originally drew this out with whatever markers I had on my desk and picked pink at first just because I like it, but then the more I thought it through, pink is the perfect color for this, because it is defined by being some mix of red and white. If you take it all the way to either extreme, it's literally not pink anymore. This isn't to say anything about "higher" or "lower" pleasures, but rather that although the instinct is probably to say that darker pink=more pink, that can be debunked easily by pointing out that red is not "more pink" than pink.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[PD18](#). The pleasure in the flesh is not increased when once the pain due to want is removed, but is only varied: and the limit as regards pleasure in the mind is begotten by the reasoned understanding of these very pleasures, and of the emotions akin to them, which used to cause the greatest fear to the mind.

[PD18](#) was definitely my main point of understanding, although I still have a ways to go in wrapping my mind around the latter part about pleasure in the mind...

Post by “Godfrey” of May 20, 2022 at 12:30 PM

[PD03](#). The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once.

As we've discussed here and elsewhere, there's a philosophical context to this PD that many people today seem to be unaware of. With that in mind, I've been thinking of the following scholion:

[PD03](#). *(Some say that pleasures are unlimited, and therefore pleasure cannot be the goal. In fact,)* the limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once.

I don't remember offhand if such a scholion already exists, but it seems like it should!

Post by "Cassius" of May 20, 2022 at 12:49 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I don't remember offhand if such a scholion already exists, but it seems like it should!

You could surely create one by quoting or citing either Seneca, or Plato from [Philebus](#)! 😊

Post by "Cassius" of May 20, 2022 at 12:54 PM

[Quote from reneliza](#)

I originally drew this out with whatever markers I had on my desk and picked pink at first just because I like it, but then the more I thought it through, pink is the perfect color for this, because it is defined by being some mix of red and white. If you take it all the way to either extreme, it's literally not pink anymore. This isn't to say anything about "higher" or "lower" pleasures, but rather that although the instinct is probably to say that darker pink=more pink, that can be debunked easily by pointing out that red is not "more pink" than pink.

A really useful aspect of displaying this issue by image (colors, the vessel analogy, etc) is that you play to the issue of the senses vs intellectual reasoning. Is the glass half-full or half-empty? You're interplaying the senses against the reasoning and having to confront that it's your

labeling of the object that gives it its "moral significance" rather than what you're seeing with your eyes. Are you optimistic and half full, or pessimistic and half-empty? Either way your eyes are reporting exactly the same thing and your mind has to take responsibility for the feeling it generates.

I get the same reaction from the use of colors or shapes. Our eyes tend to act in automatic ways, but we can use a diagram and explanation to force ourselves to confront that our mind is what is doing the labeling. Once we see that we can make progress toward realizing that we ourselves are playing a large part in creating our pleasurable or painful emotions.

All sorts of "optical illusions" probably also have the same value as teaching tools.