

DeWitt: "It Makes No Difference That Some Pleasures Are Static And Some Are Kinetic"

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THE NEW HEDONISM

intense while that associated with other parts is moderate and extended but also observed that certain pleasures, like that of escaping a violent death, affect the whole organism.

The next step in this new analysis was to declare that this fact of extension or intension was of no fundamental importance. The high value assigned to this principle is indicated by its promulgation as Authorized Doctrine 9: "If every pleasure were alike condensed in duration and associated with the whole organism or the dominant parts of it, pleasures would never differ from one another." Positively stated, the meaning would be that pleasure is always pleasure; it is of no consequence that some pleasures are associated with the mind, others with the stomach, and others with other parts, or that some affect the whole organism and others only a part, or that some are brief and intense, others moderate and extended. In other words, it makes no difference that some pleasures are static and others kinetic. Pleasure is a unit. This unity could be expressed in ancient terminology by saying that all pleasure was a kind of motion, *kinesis* or *motio*, the ancient equivalent of reaction.

Post by "Maciej" of January 28, 2018 at 4:08 PM

I thought that this doctrine suggest something exactly opposite. Hypothetical structure implies that Pleasures actually differ, so they cannot be condensed.

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2018 at 5:08 PM

Good question Maciej and I would like to get input from others on this as I admit this is hard to figure out. Here is my first effort:

I think this is another example of a doctrine that taken on its own is bewildering, but which is the kind of thing Epicurus liked to do to refute and inoculate against Platonic and other attacks on pleasure. Here, the false idea to be beaten back is that some pleasures are more worthy to be chosen than others by some outside standard of virtue, worth, nobility, or whatever. Divisions of pleasure ranked by worthiness or any standard other than pleasure itself would be fatal to Epicurean doctrine, just as believing in supernatural gods would be fatal and is inoculated against in PD1 and fearing death would be fatal and is inoculated against in PD2.

Epicurus's position was pleasure is whatever we feel to be pleasing, and there is no other criteria for judging a pleasure worthy other than the experience of pleasure itself, and the effect of a particular pleasure in leading in the future to resulting future pleasures or resulting pains. I *think* that is the sense in which DeWitt refers to the "unity of pleasure." Pleasure may differ in intensity and type and length, but it all still falls under the category of pleasure.

The way Epicurus is proving this here is to suggest the hypothetical of comparing the pleasure of eating to the pleasure of sex. If the pleasure of eating and the pleasure of sex were both hypothetically able to(1) fill the whole feeling experience of the person and (2) exist for the same length of time (I presume that is what "alike condensed in duration" means) then the experience of the pleasure of eating and the pleasure of sex would be the same for us.

If we understand that pleasure is pleasure then we aren't going to fall for the trap (and it is a trap) of thinking that some pleasures are more "worthy" than others. The trap is that if there are some pleasures that are "higher" by some standard other than pleasure, then knowledge of that standard, which is outside of pleasure, is essential. If that is the case, then the argument "pleasure is the guide / is "the good" is blown up - the highest good must be "pleasure + wisdom" or "pleasure + intelligence" or whatever. If Pleasure is the highest calling we have, then there cannot be something else which is not a part of pleasure itself which is required in order to constitute the highest and best life. That's why Epicurus insisted that all the virtues, including wisdom, prudence, etc, are simply instruments for the achievement of pleasure, and nothing more. Their existence and labeling as virtuous is dependent solely on the fact that they are tools for achieving pleasure.

I am also toying with the idea that a less important part of the context might also be to show that it is not appropriate to regret that one pleasure can't consume our entire life. The fact that pleasures can't extend to fill the whole feeling experience of the person, and that they don't consume our experience over an extended time, is what allows for variation. We know that

once full, pleasure can not grow any greater in extent, it can only vary. But on the other hand, while variation may not increase the extent of pure pleasure, there's nothing wrong with variation in and of itself. In fact in general, other things being equal, it is more desirable to live two years rather than one year, with the variation in pleasure that the extra year entails. To restate that, I think Epicurus had to admit, and did state in the letter to Menoeceus, that life is desirable and so it is desirable to experience variation even for someone whose daily life is full of pleasure. So the doctrine may also be an endorsement of variation, since Nature has made it that a single pleasure cannot be expanded to fill our entire experience.

For purposes of finding this in the future we are talking about PD 9 and I will link this to that forum.

Post by “Maciej” of January 28, 2018 at 6:33 PM

Setting aside of what you say which is generally correct exposition of part of epicurean ethics, do you agree that epicurus's conclusion in pd9 is that pleasures differ?

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2018 at 6:38 PM

"do you agree that epicurus's conclusion in pd9 is that pleasures differ?"

I better try to be very precise in understanding your question.

If you are asking "is the point of PD9 that pleasures differ" I would answer: No not really, or at least not fully. I think Epicurus held that pleasures are the same in many respects (they all feel pleasurable; all come to us through the same faculty); but certainly Epicurus would say also that we have no trouble distinguishing the difference between the pleasure of eating and the pleasure of sex.

I think we have to presume common sense always, and that Epicurus would respond as anyone would that the pleasure of sex differs in some ways from the pleasure of eating, but that there are still a great many important similarities, the most important of which is that they are reported to us as pleasures by our faculty of pleasure.

Does that respond to your question?

Post by “Maciej” of January 28, 2018 at 6:45 PM

Yes:)

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2018 at 6:51 PM

Tell me what you think, Maciej! I appreciate the opportunity to exchange ideas with you on these issues, whether or not we agree. This is a very difficult passage and I am sure I have not caught all the subtleties, and in fact I could easily be completely wrong! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2018 at 6:53 PM

As you can tell in my responses I am looking to link this back to the existing context of discussion of pleasure at the time of Epicurus. I need to reread Gosling & Taylor / Greeks on Pleasure for more detail on all this. If you are aware of other good references please let me know. Time is always short but I need to assemble a list of at least the arguments that were current - I set up a forum to work on cataloging them here: [Arguments Against Pleasure By Other Philosophers At The Time of Epicurus](#) (It's going to take me years to make any progress, I'm afraid - time is so short.)

Post by “Maciej” of January 28, 2018 at 7:19 PM

I really do not know myself what to think about this doctrine. As isolated sentence it is understandable: if pleasures could condensed they would not differ. But pleasures do differ. Therefore they cannot be condensed.

What does it means that pleasure can be condensed? I am clueless.

(In my last post i misspoke. The conclusion is not that pleasures differ but that pleasures cannot be condensed. But it makes no difference for our discussion. The fact that pleasures differ is taken as self evident premise of the judgement.)

I doubt that dewitt interprets this doctrine correctly. He seems to think that the conclusion is that pleasure is a unit. But anyone who reads pd9 have to admit that is not the case in context of this doctrine.

I suppose that because it is pd it should be understandable for common greek in time of formation of list of doctrines. This was the most public of epicurean texts, introduction to philosophy. On the other hand it could be reply to some obscure statement in platos dialogues or aristotle nicomachean ethics or of the megarian logicians or cyrenaics

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2018 at 7:27 PM

What do you take "condensed" to mean?

Post by “Maciej” of January 28, 2018 at 8:58 PM

Quick guess: That they can be added to themselves like for example 3 apples to 2 apples as opposite to adding apples and oranges which cannot be properly added to themselves because they are qualitatively different.

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2018 at 6:18 AM

My first reaction to that is that I would want to dig into the Greek to see how the translators come up with "condensed" as the best translation in the first place. Using the definition you suggest would certainly lead to your conclusion that pleasures are qualitatively different, but it seems to me that your definition presumes that result (cannot be properly added to themselves because they are qualitatively different), and so I would still have to question why that result should be presumed. If I could go back in time I would take up the study of ancient Greek instead of just a little Latin.

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2018 at 6:24 AM

[Elli](#) when you have time would you comment on the Greek that is being translated as "condensed" in PD9?

Post by “Maciej” of January 29, 2018 at 8:19 AM

Hicks uses the word accumulated instead condensed.

Cassius please remember. It is just a quick guess. And i do not believe that your criticism gave it justice. Fact that pleasures are different qualitatively it is not my conclusion, it is premise of principle doctrine.

Nevertheless lets wait for someone else to add to the discussion.

And Cassius. Please bear in mind that pd 10 and 11 have hypotheticalal structure as well and are generally understood in the same pattern.

Post by “Hiram” of January 29, 2018 at 5:20 PM

Diogenes' Wall argues that pleasures of the mind link us to past and future experiences, and can be more intense, stronger, and of longer duration than those of the body, and argue that we are "in control of our (mental) disposition", which seems to indicate that some kind of mental discipline is needed to secure long-term pleasures by habituating ourselves to be in a pleasant disposition.

<https://theautarkist.wordpress.com/2017/03/25/dio...-the-pleasures/>

<https://theautarkist.wordpress.com/2017/03/31/dio...al-doctrine-20/>

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2018 at 5:43 PM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/328-dewitt-it-makes-no-difference-that-some-pleasures-are-static-and-some-are-kineti/>

I think we are still some distance even from framing the question clearly as to what we are talking about. I think we all agree that pleasures from different activities differ from each other in many respects, yet in other respects they share similarities. If we regard there to be a single faculty of pleasure, then anything that faculty tells us is pleasurable is makes it pleasurable, even if it also has many distinct characteristics which allow us to identify it separate from other pleasures. Just like "yellow" does not exist separate and distinct from things that are yellow, "pleasure" does not exist separate and distinct from things we find pleasurable. I think we are agreed at least on that (?)

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2018 at 5:46 PM

Hiram I checked your page but didn't see a direct quote from Oinoanda that we are in control of our mental disposition. If you know of such a passage that would be relevant to the "free will" debate.

Post by “Hiram” of January 31, 2018 at 10:23 AM

I did a quick search in WordPad through [the document](#) for the word "disposition" and this is what came out:

Fr. 111

It is not nature, which is the same for all, that makes people noble or ignoble, but their actions and dispositions.

Fr. 112

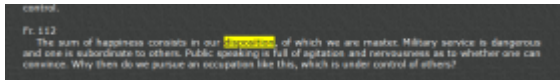
The sum of happiness consists in our disposition, of which we are master. Military service is dangerous and one is subordinate to others. Public speaking is full of agitation and nervousness as to whether one can convince. Why then do we pursue an occupation like this, which is under control of others?

Fr. 113

Nothing is so conducive to contentment as not being occupied with much business, not tackling distasteful matters, and not being forced at all beyond one's own capability. For all these things provoke disturbances in our nature.

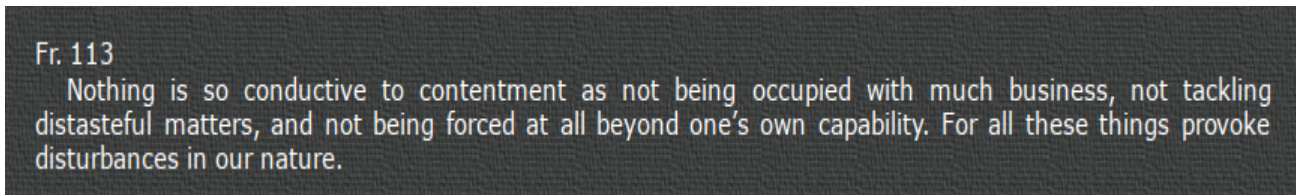
Post by "Cassius" of January 31, 2018 at 2:12 PM

That 112 is particularly interesting to me - I see it is a fragment not in a larger context - The latter part about not wanting to be in an occupation under the control of others makes perfect sense, but to say "the sum of happiness consists in our disposition of which we are master" is a very broad statement that probably has obvious context requirements as to the definitions of "sum" and "happiness." That would relate to the Ciceronian criticism that a man can be happy even while being roasted alive. I remember DeWitt deals with that by distinguishing happiness as being a reference to general attitude. But to equate happiness with disposition as full equivalents seems to me requires lots of caveats and definitions. I bet this is a phrase where scrutinizing the translation from the Greek would be interesting.



Post by "Cassius" of January 31, 2018 at 2:18 PM

Look at fragment 113, also without wider context. Applied literally this one would be a prescription for living in a cave, and I would consider it significantly contradictory to other passages if it were not placed in context.



For example from Lucretius Book VI (Baliey):

"And so with his discourse of truthful words he purged the heart and set a limit to its desire and fear, and set forth what is the highest good, towards which we all strive, and pointed out the path, whereby along a narrow track we may strain on towards it in a straight course; he showed what there is of ill in the affairs of mortals everywhere, coming to being and flying abroad in diverse forms, be it by the chance or the force of nature, because nature had so brought it to pass; he showed from what gates it is meet to sally out against each ill, and he proved that 'tis in vain for the most part that the race of men set tossing in their hearts the gloomy billows of care."

Why would we ever strive or strain for anything, why would we ever sally out from any gate to meet any ill, if we were going to set a rule of never being occupied with much business, never tackling distasteful matters, or pushing ourselves to expand our capabilities?

So I would say this one requires gentle handling due to the lack of context.

Post by “Hiram” of February 1, 2018 at 12:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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This is echoed in Philodemus' On Property Management. Philodemus says "the philosopher DOES NOT TOIL", and also praises the practice of delegating tasks. So, obviously a manager of an estate is not living in a cave, but values his time and does not do menial labor, dedicating himself instead to more pleasant activities without losing his diligence and responsibilities.