

Dialogue on Katastematic Pleasure

Post by “Hiram” of February 16, 2018 at 4:33 PM

Dialogue on Katastematic Pleasure

<http://societyofepicurus.com/dialogue-on-katastematic-pleasure/>

On the Standard Interpretation of Static Pleasure

<http://societyofepicurus.com/on-the-standar...tatic-pleasure/>

Post by “Maciej” of February 17, 2018 at 5:42 AM

It was great pleasure reading your exchange (all of you) but while you are focusing on ciceros interpretation and critique, which is in itself important, you fail to take into consideration central epicurean text about ethics. And in light of these passages katastematic\kinetic distinction should be debated. Even wenham seems to make the same mistake when he rushes to ciceros interpretation without introduction based on the letter.

From letter to menoeceus:

Quote

The steady contemplation of \different desires\ enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject in terms of the health of the body and the serenity of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life. Our every action is done so that we will not be in pain or fear. As soon as we achieve this, the soul is released from every storm, since an animal has no other need and must seek nothing else to complete the goodness of body and soul. Thus we need pleasure only when we are in pain caused by its absence; but when we are not in pain then we have no need of pleasure.

And later he adds:

Quote

when we say that pleasure is the goal, \we mean\ to be free from bodily pain and mental disturbance. For a pleasant life is produced (...) by sober reasoning, searching

out the cause of everything we accept or reject, and driving out opinions that cause the greatest trouble in the soul.

Yes. Epicurus says this himself. When he says that pleasure is the goal he means freedom of pain and anxiety. All context is here. Period.

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2018 at 6:15 AM

Thank you both so far for posting. I will reply further to both but here is what I posted as preliminary thoughts:

Thanks for all the work you put into this Hiram. I have been busy and even now have not been able to read closely through this or the associated article on the standard interpretation of static pleasure. I have skimmed but will do go over this in much more detail as soon as possible and comment further. However based on what I have read this is the expected framework of my reaction:

Pleasure is an experience of life, and experiences of life occur only through mental and bodily feeling. Total absence of feeling is death. Because pleasures are feelings, and not reasonings or concepts, pleasures have no existence apart from our experience of them. It is not even possible to convey more than the sketchiest experience of feelings in words, much less it is possible through reasoning to fully describe pleasures. Pleasures therefore cannot be reduced to concepts, and even the most intelligent computer can never experience feelings through logical circuitry.

Cicero's argument against Epicurus is effective because most people understand that pleasures are feelings, just as Epicurus said. Most people also know the reverse - that there is no pleasure (or anything else) in non-feeling. Standing alone, a statement that says or implies that "absence of pain" equals "the highest pleasure" is nonsensical and absurd. That is because absent the Epicurean premises about nature of all feelings being either pleasure or pain, such a statement says nothing about what IS being felt. To most people, the statement "absence of pain" conveys nothing about what is being felt, and by implication implies that NOTHING is being felt. This is again an absurdity since total absence of feeling is death, not the highest pleasure. If all pleasure is feeling, the greatest pleasure cannot come through non-feeling.

Cicero would never have had an argument, and we would not be discussing this, but for the widespread implication that "katastematic pleasure" or "absence of pain" is not only non-

feeling, but it is also different in kind and superior to other forms of pleasure. That was the general implication of the words then, and it is the general implication of them today. But since all pleasures of any kind come only through the experience of feeling, terms like "absence of pain" and "katastematic" create cognitive dissonance - obvious contradictions which cannot be reconciled.

I'll defer this to another discussion, but I also think discussing "the highest pleasure" is on its face a nonsensical position in Epicurean terms. There is no single category or description of pleasure that is higher than all others ****other than**** as a measure of "quantity" or "purity," which is the way I believe this discussion was intended, as a technical response to Platonic arguments about quantity and purity. The pleasure that comes when we escape near death, which is the best description we have from Epicurus as to "the good," seems to me to be a statement of tremendous intensity of feeling, the furthest thing possible from what is conveyed by "absence of pain" or "katastematic pleasure."

Post by "Cassius" of February 17, 2018 at 6:23 AM

As for Maciej's posts, definitely those passages cited need to be considered in the analysis, and my view of them is the same as the rest. Epicurus has stated as a preliminary observation that death is absence of sensation, which means that all life - especially pleasure - comes through sensation. Given that there are only two "feelings" - pleasure and pain - then when we are not feeling pain we are necessarily feeling pleasures, and there is no neutral state. So under that analysis we are either feeling ordinary pleasures, or we are feeling ordinary pains, and while it would not be necessary for Epicurus to add the word 'ordinary' given his clear statements as to the nature of pleasure, that has now become the battleground, because "absence of pain" means nothing in the modern context except a nullity.

Once we accept that we would not know pleasures except through sensation of them - through the normal feelings of good food, good drink, smooth motion, sex, and all the other innumerable examples - this passage gives us no problem. But leaving those out and refusing to define the state of absence of pain as ordinary pleasure in a way that people can immediately understand it is simply, in my view, to fall over and over again into the trap used by Cicero of isolating a single passage and acting as if it has no relationship to the rest of the philosophy.

Post by "Cassius" of February 17, 2018 at 6:30 AM

[Quote from Maciej](#)

Yes. Epicurus says this himself. When he says that pleasure is the goal he means freedom of pain and anxiety. All context is here. Period.

Maciej:

In my view the best way to advance this discussion is to address the contradiction that Cicero exploited from the point of view of those who he knows will agree with him - normal people who normally define pleasure in terms of feeling. If you contend that "freedom from pain and anxiety" is the full context of the description of the goal, please describe what you are ****feeling**** when you are free from pain.

Post by "Maciej" of February 17, 2018 at 4:44 PM

Absence of pain or freedom from pain or health of the body means what it sounds. The same thing in modern and ancient context. Who understands this is unimpressed by arguments in Cicero.

For Epicurus it was full context. You can ask me to describe whiteness of the snow I can only point to something white and say: "like this". We had this discussion. Do you remember when you were in pain? I am assuming that you do. But now you are not? Ok then compare one state with the other and you find what you are looking for.

Post by "Cassius" of February 17, 2018 at 4:50 PM

Yes Maciej we continue to disagree on this and I expect we always will, but the discussion is helpful nevertheless. I certainly know what it feels like to have had a fever, and not to have it any more. Is that difference pleasurable? Certainly. Is that difference a complete description of what Epicurus meant by the greatest possible pleasure? Is that difference stated alone an example of the "full context" of pleasure given by Epicurus? I maintain it most certainly is not. So we will continue to respectfully disagree .

Post by “Maciej” of February 17, 2018 at 4:53 PM

I have hope that there is a way to make you see the light in this issue. Or feel the heat.

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2018 at 6:36 PM

LOL - Either will be interesting interactions 😊

Mostly because I do believe it is not just a matter of words.

I believe it translations into a basic assessment of how we should be oriented to life - are we primarily reacting to outside impacts from pain? Clearly in many cases people find themselves in situation where that is and should be their primary goal, such as when they are sick, or oppressed from some force that demands their constant attention.

But I do not consider that to be the primary point of view from which we should analyze life. As Epicurus says in the letter to Menoeceus, (Bailey) - "(He thinks that with us lies the chief power in determining events, some of which happen by necessity) and some by chance, and some are within our control; for while necessity cannot be called to account, he sees that chance is inconstant, but that which is in our control is subject to no master, and to it are naturally attached praise and blame.")

If we have either the "chief power" or even only significant power, to have influence over our lives, then it is up to us to choose the type of actions and pleasures which we choose to pursue, and how we identify those pleasures, and how we think about them, is going to be highly important. And while I am not going so far as to say that I do and you don't, or that either of us should, I believe it is fair to say that a significant number of people can and do legitimately take the position that "ending pain" is an essentially negative approach toward life which is not justified by the underlying analysis of nature which Epicurus taught. (And that as a result, that Epicurus saw the same thing and did not in fact teach that.)

But we will go round and round on this probably as long as we live, as such points are not "solvable" in the way of a physics question. 😊

Post by “Maciej” of February 17, 2018 at 6:58 PM

Epicurus precisely say and let me quote

Quote

The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject in terms of the health of the body and the serenity of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life.

So please find and let us know those fragments that will enlighten us. Or let be enlighten by us by pointing to you what is evident to everybody.

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2018 at 7:01 PM

I can assure you that this is not "evident to everybody" and that I am not alone, or Cicero would never have bothered to make the argument in the first place! 😊

Post by “Maciej” of February 17, 2018 at 7:07 PM

Evident to everybody who can detach evidence from opinion. Sensation from judgement. Etc.

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2018 at 7:24 PM

I don't quite understand that last comment Maciej, can you explain? Cicero (a very bright guy, though not Epicurean) believed that there was a contradiction in "absence of pain" and "the highest pleasure" despite his very thorough knowledge and background in Epicurean theory. Had he thought the answer was "evident" he would presumably have not bothered to make the argument. Within the context of the argument that Cicero presented, what is so clear to you that was not to Cicero?

A subset of that question is: "Do you contend Cicero was simply obtuse, or was he intentionally misrepresenting Epicurean philosophy?"

Post by “Maciej” of February 17, 2018 at 7:51 PM

I do not think than cicero was bright guy. Or maybe that no matter as bright he could have been his republican patriotism made him blind.

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2018 at 8:54 PM

Ok well we will chalk that up to another disagreement. I think Cicero was a bright guy, and that his attack was chosen astutely to inflict maximum damage. You're essentially defending Torquatus' response, which Cicero knew would not make sense to the majority of people reading "On Ends." From here it's just up to each one of us to come to our own conclusion as to whether Torquatus' response is the one Epicurus would have given had he been there to reply to Cicero.

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2018 at 11:05 PM

As I think about this further and compare positions I would predict that Hiram would not defend Torquatus' response as you do, Maciej. If I read Hiram's position correctly, Hiram is equating the 'absence of pain' position to an attitudinal emotional experience which Hiram would also consider to be a positive pleasurable feeling in the normal sense of those words, rather than follow Torquatus' line to leave the answer as something that can only be defined as the absence of some prior pain.

I don't know that Hiram has stated how he would consider either "absence of pain" or "katastematic pleasure" to be the highest possible pleasure, however, so I am not sure how to predict on that.

(In writing this post I was reviewing book 2 of "On Ends" and one thing I am sure of: there is a LOT of important material in Book 2 that we have not been discussing over the years at the Facebook group. The applicable answer here is that it is possible I missed something, but it does not appear that Cicero allowed Torquatus to explain any further the meaning of "absence of pain" so we are left uncertain as to whether he had any more explanation to give.)

Post by “Maciej” of February 18, 2018 at 6:27 AM

Quote from torquatus that corroborates Epicurus exposition in menocueus

Quote

The pleasure we pursue is not that kind alone which directly affects our physical being with a delightful feeling—a positively agreeable perception of the senses; on the contrary, the greatest pleasure according to us is that which is experienced as a result of the complete removal of pain. **When we are released from pain, the mere sensation of complete emancipation and relief from uneasiness is in itself a source of gratification. But everything that causes gratification is a pleasure (just as everything that causes annoyance is a pain). Therefore the complete removal of pain has correctly been termed a pleasure.** For example, when hunger and thirst are banished by food and drink, the mere fact of getting rid of uneasiness brings a resultant pleasure in its train.

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2018 at 7:44 AM

Several comments, while keeping in mind that this is a translation so it's unclear how far precise word choice is correct:

(1) "not that kind ALONE" of course endorses feelings of delight without giving any indication that Epicurus held this to be an inferior kind of pleasure.

(2) Yes, that is where Torquatus (as written by Cicero) claims that "the greatest pleasure" is a result of the complete removal of pain. The rest of the statement is nothing more than a statement that removal of pain is a pleasure, with which of course I agree. The key controverted issue we are discussing is whether and how "complete removal of pain" constitutes a complete description of "the greatest pleasure" which is what I reject as clearly false and intentionally misleading by Cicero. From the respect of "quantity" or "purity" yes, but from the respect of a positive statement of what is being experienced, I say clearly no. And the fact that this deficiency in explanation and apparent contradiction is so clear, on its face, is what makes Cicero's argument so compelling.

Lawyers do not state their opponent's cases as their opponents want them stated. They state their opponent's cases by drawing and quartering the opponent's position into segments, and taking isolated statements to logical extremes which the opponent's full case would never

embrace or reach due to other factors they state in their full case.

As Cicero points out here through Torquatus, Epicurus grounded pleasure in "positive agreeable perception of the senses," because in fact he had previously laid the foundation that absence of sensation is death. Going further, I am not sure that a case can be made that Epicurus endorsed ANY notion of pleasure that is not defined within a "positive agreeable perception of the senses."

All the rest of the exposition is simply to note that just like any other "positive agreeable perception of the senses," relief from hunger, thirst, or other pain is ALSO perceived as a "positive agreeable perception of the senses." None of that establishes a definition of a state which is the "highest pleasure" except in one sense alone: that all pain has been driven away, and therefore the other "positive agreeable perceptions of the senses" are felt in their most intense, most delightful, undiluted form.

Though we disagree this exchange is highly helpful, because I know at least in my case that I have given far too little time to reading and expanding Book 2.

Post by "Cassius" of February 18, 2018 at 8:56 AM

Also, I want to repeat the essence of my position, which is to accept as fundamental the statement that is given in PD3, here in the Bailey version:

***"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."*

"Absence of pain" is extremely significant for precisely the reason stated here: it is the **"limit of quantity in pleasures."** "Absence of pain" is a term that describes "the limit of quantity" of pleasure; it is not a complete description of those pleasures that are being experienced while all pain is removed.

No complete description of those pleasures being experienced by any individual when all pain is gone is in fact possible, because no complete description of the list of ordinary mental and physical pleasures is possible. There are innumerable ordinary mental and physical pleasures of the innumerable types, but the one thing we can say about ALL pleasures is that they are "positive agreeable perceptions of the senses," with "senses" being interpreted broadly to include mental pleasures, which can be more intense than physical ones.

Post by "Maciej" of February 18, 2018 at 9:21 AM

Ad1. It kind of does indicate this. We can paraphrase torquatus and say that a positively agreeable perception of the senses is not the kind of pleasure that we pursue alone. Epicurus warns about this in [pd10](#). if we would pursue this kind of pleasures alone then we would not only loose the greatest pleasure but also those pleasures will be spoiled by fear that one day we will loose them and sickness or addiction or boredom caused by not knowing limits of our desires. Look at [pd10](#) and menoeceus again.

Ad2. So you do not feel in torquatus words **sensation of complete emancipation and relief from uneasiness?** Is this what you are firmly convinced is false and you are rejecting it?

Ad. Lawyers...

I am not threatened by lawyers sophisms and tricks. I look at secondary source which is torquatus speach and compare it with primary source which is letter to menoeceus. Where torquatus confirms epicurus or elaborates on his basis then i have no reason to exlude him. There is no reason to fear torquatus or any souRce for that matter. Fear leads to overcriticism and overcriticism leads to misunderstanding.

Ad. As cicero...

There is nothing in this fragment about death so i do not know what you are talkin about. Of course there is another kind of pleasure than agreeable perception of the senses which epicurus endorses in quoted fragments in menoeceus and in pd.10 for example. I urge you not to forget about evidence that was presented already.

Ad all the rest...

Memory of past pleasures, hopes of future ones and meditations of philosophy are not felt by senses. When you are relieved from fear in what sense organ you feel positive agreement? In your eye or tongue?

Post by "Maciej" of February 18, 2018 at 9:35 AM

Pd3 yes it is limit of quantity or magnitude. The point where pleasure is at its highest or greatest. The other pleasures that you are speaking of are seasoning of this state. Not the essence of it.

Post by "Cassius" of February 18, 2018 at 9:43 AM

When you refer to "agreeable perception of the senses" you are apparently trying to limit the discussion to "the five senses."

You do not seem to accept mental pleasures as agreeable perceptions of the senses at all. That would exclude all mental processes, including joy and delight, which are clearly considered to be "a delightful feeling—a positively agreeable perception of the senses."

If you do not consider joy and delight to be mental processes, then we have a long way to backtrack, back to the nature of death as the end of all sensation in PD2. I would contend it was clear to Epicurus that a person could still be alive while not experiencing any present stimulation of the five senses, but still experiencing mental processes, and so mental pleasures of joy and delight, as well as mental pains are clearly of the ordinary variety and something different is not indicated.

As for "**sensation of complete emancipation and relief from uneasiness?**" I am quite accepting that complete relief from one or more pains is a pleasurable feeling. I am rejecting that "absence" alone, without a positive experience of pleasures such as are ordinarily felt, does not equate in every respect to "the highest pleasure," except in a measure of quantity.

You are saying "absence of pain is the highest pleasure" and that is all anyone needs to know. I am saying "Far from it!" That is not only not all anyone needs to know, but without an explanation of the limited quantitative context, such as statement implies absence of all feeling, and in practical terms is the biggest "turn-off" to the philosophy imaginable, which is why Cicero employed it.

Post by "Cassius" of February 18, 2018 at 11:21 AM

As time permits I am going to supplement this thread with other references and arguments, including this one: ** That Cicero's argument about "absence of pain" being the "highest pleasure" is not supported, and by not being addressed is not seen to be significant, by contemporary sympathetic Epicureans who had access to proper sources and therefore spoke with authority. Examples which support this observation are:

1 - The discussion of Epicurus and Pleasure in Lucian's "The Double Indictment," which makes no mention of such distinctions, found here: [Lucian: The Case of Porch vs. Pleasure](#)

2- The [letter of Cassius Longinus to Cicero](#) in which Cassius makes no reference to "absence of pain" but states that the desirability of pleasure "and" tranquility of mind is true and demonstrable and not "hard to convince" people of: "I am glad that our friend Pansa was sped on his way by universal goodwill when he left the city in military uniform, and that not only on my own account, but also, most assuredly, on that of all our friends. For I hope that men generally will come to understand how much all the world hates cruelty, and how much it loves integrity and clemency, and that the blessings most eagerly sought and coveted by the bad ultimately find their way to the good. For it is hard to convince men that "the good is to be chosen for its own sake"; but that pleasure and tranquillity of mind is acquired by virtue, justice, and the good is both true and demonstrable. Why, Epicurus himself, from whom all the Catiuses and [Amafiniuses](#) in the world, incompetent translators of terms as they are, derive their origin, lays it down that "to live a life of pleasure is impossible without living a life of virtue and justice". Consequently Pansa, who follows pleasure, keeps his hold on virtue, and those also whom you call pleasure-lovers are lovers of what is good and lovers of justice, and cultivate and keep all the virtues."

3 - Lucretius, who makes no reference to absence of pain being the highest pleasure.

In contrast, is there any example of an authoritative **Epicurean** figure who gives a similar argument to that which Cicero places in the mouth of Torquatus? [We have already listed the dispute in regard to the letter to the proper interpretation of the letter to Menoecus.]

Post by "Maciej" of February 18, 2018 at 11:21 AM

First. I urge you not to forget what epicurus says explicitly about absence of pain (or freedom from pain or removal of pain or health of body since those expressions points to the same thing).

Quote

Our every action is done so that we will not be in pain or fear. As soon as we achieve this, the soul is released from every storm, since an animal has no other need and must seek nothing else to complete the goodness of body and soul.

Secondly. What do you mean by pleasure as is ordinary felt? Please give me examples.

Post by "Maciej" of February 18, 2018 at 11:27 AM

Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. From absence of essential part of epicurean doctrine in Lucian you cannot infer the absence of that doctrine in whole epicureanism.

And argument in Cicero is supported by letter to Menoecus.

Post by "Cassius" of February 18, 2018 at 11:34 AM

[Quote from Maciej](#)

Secondly. What do you mean by pleasure as is ordinary felt? Please give me examples.

All mental and bodily pleasures - "feelings" that are understandable without need for explanation or logical explanation. Bodily: Good food, good wine, sex, music Mental: All consciousness activities of the mind, whether reading a book, thinking about philosophy, or having a confident and pleased attitude toward life. All of these and many more are "felt" - these are all mental and bodily feelings that are "felt" by any ordinary person without need for explanation.

Recall that Torquatus admits that he does not agree with Epicurus on whether pleasure can or should be defended logically. This passage betrays that Torquatus was intentionally deviating from Epicurus, and shows that it should not be surprising that "Torquatus" (Cicero himself) would extend an argument about quantity to try to make a point that Epicurus was too wise to make himself:

"Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine. These say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses. The facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly, they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a natural and innate idea of the mind. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case. In their view, it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain."

That passage is the tipoff to why Torquatus' logical extension of "absence of pain" to be a full description of the highest pleasure cannot be trusted. Epicurus was talking only quantity. Torquatus/Cicero misrepresented that statement of quantity to mean equality in every respect.

The logical extreme is not representative of the original point (see nearby post on Cassius, Lucian, and Lucretius, who are contemporary or later than Cicero, and are not recorded to have made any analogous points).

Post by “Maciej” of February 18, 2018 at 11:56 AM

Torquatus is not not agreeing with epicurus. He and other epicureans thought that philosophy should be elaborated and developed further. I have no opinion on this subject right now but it very well maybe true that at time of epicurus there was no need for logical arguement and in time of philodemus and torquatus such arguement was needed.

Evolution of doctrine is natural thing. And it was probably unavoidable since in hellenistic and roman times philosophy became part of education, there was more interaction between members of philosophical sects, so there was more opportunities to refine, precise and develop the doctrines.

Btw Lukian was not epicurean himself and i do not know why all of you treating him like one. Because he spoke favorably about epicureanism three times in entire corpus of works? By the same standard seneca should be epicurean also and even bigger one since he spoke favourably about epicurus more than 20 times in one book.

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2018 at 12:34 PM

Another way of stating this issue is this:

Rather than suggesting that "absence of pain" is a complete description of the highest and best life, my contention is that the highest and best life pointed to by Epicurus was this, also from Torquatus, which is clear and needs no interpretation through logic:

"The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. What possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain. He will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by

brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement."

Post by "Cassius" of February 18, 2018 at 12:37 PM

As for your contention about Torquatus implicitly being smarter than Epicurus and seeing a need to engage in "word-chopping" where Epicurus did not, I will simply reply that I consider Epicurus to have been much too smart than to go down the road of considering "absence of pain" to be a complete statement of the goal of his philosophy. By doing so, later Epicureans, if Cicero can be trusted on that point, fell into the trap that Epicurus himself did not and that has diverted us down this path toward Stoicism and back.

As for whether Lucian was an Epicurean himself that is not so important as the fact that he was familiar enough with his subjects to write articulately about him - people can read and judge for themselves where Lucian's sympathies really were. As to Cicero, Cassius, and Lucretius, there is little doubt as to their sympathies.

Post by "Maciej" of February 18, 2018 at 11:01 PM

i am not implying this at all. What i said and let me be clear on this: maybe they have reacted to the change of philosophical discourse at their time.

Or we can look at this in another way. Desire to engage in logical argument with opposing school and defend philosophy although unnecessary it is natural. As long as it is in reasonable limits it trains the mind and brings pleasure during reflection and debating itself.

Well nevermind.

And yes in letter of menoeceus epicurus states that

Quote

Our every action is done so that we will not be in pain or fear.

Either you consciously ignoring this fact or you have to admit that epicurus himself was a stoic. I will let you decide for yourself.

Post by “Cassius” of February 19, 2018 at 7:02 AM

No, I am not ignoring that, I am simply emphasizing that before he said that, he said this:

And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.

He is saying that we avoid pain and fear because we want pleasure, not because our primary overriding goal is to avoid pain and fear. If our primary overriding goal were narrowly drawn to constitute avoidance of pain, which is the result of your construction, then the logical result would be suicide, because only through death can we avoid all pain. But the goal of life is pleasure, and we live for pleasure, not for nothingness.

As you say, everyone has to decide for themselves whether their goal is simply to avoid all pain, or whether it is to achieve pleasure even at the cost of some pain. And an excellent test of that question is that posed by Cicero in referencing Hieronymus of Rhodes, from whose doctrine Epicurus is very distinct, but which is the logical conclusion of your position. And that is because the pleasure you describe is only that which is needed to satisfy pains, rather than that pleasure which is the goal of life regardless of the pain required to attain it:

Do you remember, then,” I said, “what Hieronymus of Rhodes pronounces to be the Chief Good, the standard as he conceives it to which all other things should be referred?” “I remember,” said he, “that he considers the End to be freedom from pain.” “Well,” said I, “what is the same philosopher’s view about pleasure?” “He thinks that pleasure is not desirable in itself.” “Then in his opinion to feel pleasure is a different thing from not feeling pain?” “Yes,” he said, “and there he is seriously mistaken, since, as I have just shown, the complete removal of pain is the limit of the increase of pleasure.” “Oh,” I said, “as for the formula ‘freedom from pain,’ I will consider its meaning later on; but unless you are extraordinarily obstinate you are bound to admit that ‘freedom from pain’ does not mean the same as ‘pleasure.’ ”

Post by “Hiram” of February 19, 2018 at 2:26 PM

[Quote from Maciej](#)

Btw Lukian was not epicurean himself and i do not know why all of you treating him like one. Because he spoke favorably about epicureanism three times in entire corpus of works? By the same standard seneca should be epicurean also and even bigger one since he spoke favourably about epicurus more than 20 times in one book.

Lucian's words about Epicurus in "Alexander the oracle monger" exhibit a level of reverence comparable to Lucretius in DRN.

Post by “Maciej” of February 19, 2018 at 10:09 PM

Like Seneca in letters. Proper place of Lukian's relation to epicureanism is a secondary source and not what was proposed above - standard and point of reference for specific doctrine in epicurean philosophy.

Lukian was eclectic freethinker. His views can be best described as skeptical cynicism or cynical skepticism. Many protagonists of his dialogues are named cyniskus or Diogenes if I remember correctly. Best example of his skepticism is dialogue Hermotimos where he uses several skeptical tropes against dogmatists, which is evident for anyone who has knowledge of greek philosophy at the level of Diogenes Laertius Lives. I remind you that some skeptical tropes were invented specifically to counter epicurean canonic. God momos is another example of his cynical skeptical inclination to mockery of established religion and astrology. Those are the issues where three schools overlap a bit so epicureanism could be Lukians third source of inspiration. distant third place. Very distant.

Nevertheless Lukians dialogues and diatribes in themselves are great read and I recommend them strongly to anybody who accidentally gets them in their hands. You can lick a little bit of philosophy from them.

Post by “Cassius” of February 19, 2018 at 11:38 PM

We can disagree on several of your points, especially as to Hermotimus, but in this context the only point in raising Lucian is that he was clearly familiar with the central contentions of the rival philosophies, and in presenting Epicurus' philosophy he makes no mention of absence of

pain or a katastematic category of pleasure, which provides inferential evidence that those were not in fact central points of the philosophy.

Post by “Maciej” of February 20, 2018 at 12:00 AM

Cassius one more time. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. You go down the shore, you fill a cup with water. It's got no fish in it. Does that mean no fish in the ocean?

Post by “Maciej” of February 20, 2018 at 12:06 AM

"Thus we need pleasure only when we are in pain caused by its absence; but when we are not in pain then we have no need of pleasure." Epicurus

Post by “Cassius” of February 20, 2018 at 6:47 AM

[Quote from Maciej](#)

"Thus we need pleasure only when we are in pain caused by its absence; but when we are not in pain then we have no need of pleasure." Epicurus

And given tremendous evidence from the rest of the texts that passage clearly means one thing: We have no need of **MORE** pleasure when we are not in pain, because when we are not in pain our experience is full of the pleasures that have accumulated while we were in the process of eliminating pain. There is absolutely no inconsistency whatsoever between that passage and the many passages stating clearly that PLEASURE is the alpha and omega and the spring for all our actions. Every one of these passages that appear to cause a problem with the standard pleasure model are just truisms based on the quantity of one being the measure of the quantity of the other, since (1) pleasure and pain are the only two feelings that exist, and (2) there is a limit to what we are able to experience.

Post by “brett” of February 21, 2018 at 3:26 PM

[Quote from Maciej](#)

Epicurus precisely say and let me quote

So please find and let us know those fragments that will enlighten us. Or let be enlighten by us by pointing to you what is evident to everybody.

Evident to you. Not to everyone. Please understand that clearly some far more seasoned scholars than any of us have taken both sides. This is not a clear-cut 'of course' issue.

Post by “Cassius” of February 21, 2018 at 4:16 PM

I don't think there is any doubt but that the central formula is to avoid pleasures which will create more pain than the pleasures are worth. And as a result there is going to be a bias against pleasures that are bound to create huge problems, for example, the pleasure of becoming world dictator. The action of trying to become world dictator is pretty much bound to create so much negative reaction that the resulting pain is simply not going to be worth any exhilaration in trying, at least by the calculation of most people.

But who is to say how that calculation should be made in any individual case? There is clearly no god or central point of idealistic correctness from which one can say in a godlike manner: "Thou shall not seek to become world dictator" and conclude that the rule applies to everyone, everywhere, at all times. The reason the advice is so sweepingly valid comes from the nature of people we can expect to encounter, but as there is no central enforcing agency it is possible that under certain circumstances steps toward being world dictator might be appropriate (and in this analogy I am thinking of Maciej's earlier statements that an Epicurean would always reject participation in war, which I disagree with also).

So while we can say very clearly that (1) "pleasure is the goal" and, (2) since that is the case, we should avoid pleasures which are going to create more pain than pleasure" we are still left with the observation that there is no central authority as to what pleasure is "worth" to each individual in every context. It seems to me that that calculation is ALWAYS going to be an individual decision based on the totality of that person's circumstances, and the fact that there may be a bias toward actions which generate pleasures that are sustainable, we know that Epicurus said that the goal is not the life that is the longest, but the happiest. I take that to mean that if we can gain a very large degree of pleasure from actions which are risky, it's still valid Epicurean thinking to take that risk. It seems to me therefore very justifiable in Epicurean

terms to conclude that living a day as a lion, enjoying the more intense pleasures that are available to a lion, could be chosen over living a decade as a sheep, presuming that the pleasures of a sheep are less intense than those of a lion.

Another factor to consider, though, is that coming from the point of view of "unity of pleasure," then "pleasure is pleasure" and the pleasure of living in a cave chewing tobacco is not entirely different in nature than the pleasure of being an astronaut on a rocket ship to the moon. Just as I can justify the choice of being the astronaut, I think an Epicurean could justify the option of chewing tobacco in a cave. But if an Epicurean was advising someone who had to choose between the two, he would still tell that person to choose the option which leads to the happiest life, not the longest life, and the Epicurean would leave the decision in that person's hands to judge individually.

So in sum it seems to me that the important issue is to point out that the faculty of pleasure and pain is the ultimate arbiter of what to choose and to avoid, and that in itself is revolutionary and profoundly important for people to understand, so that they see that it is not gods and not abstract idealism which is the proper standard. It's much more important that people see that the choice is between "guides" to follow, and that the choice is religion vs logic vs pleasure/

pain, than it is to establish that there is a single best path among the various pleasures that can be chosen.

This is another place to mention the example of our departed friend from the Epicurean Facebook group Amrinder Singh, who died in an ultralight airplane accident. Amrinder chose to



much sooner than it might have and say that he should not have and that Amrinder lived the life that