

Practical exercises: PD4

Post by “Godfrey” of July 13, 2021 at 8:06 PM

Quote

*PD3: “The removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, pain or distress or their combination is absent. **PD4: Pain does not last continuously in the flesh: when acute it is there for a very short time, while the pain which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not persist for many days; and chronic illnesses contain an excess of pleasure in the flesh over pain.**” Long and Sedley translation*

Exercise: focus on pleasurable sensations, thoughts, feelings and actions and, later, think about what happened to your mental and physical pains.

Notes: Quote from [Don](#) from ([RE: Practical exercises: PD2](#) “I sometimes have a hard time accepting PD4. Theoretically, yes. Practically? I reach for Tylenol when I have a headache! A chronic, painful condition? That's going to be hard... But maybe PD4 gives us a goal?”

For me, PD4 becomes clearer when not separated from PD3. In this context, I think it's appropriate to use the same exercise for both PD3 and PD4 as they are basically two sides of the same coin.

From Cicero's On Ends, 1.37-39 (with omissions): “Thus when hunger and thirst have been removed by food and drink, the mere withdrawal of distress brings pleasure forth as its consequence. So quite generally the removal of pain causes pleasure to take its place. (7) Hence Epicurus did not accept the existence of anything in between pleasure and pain. What some people regarded as in between – the complete absence of pain – was not only pleasure but also the greatest pleasure. For anyone aware of his own condition must either have pleasure or pain. Epicurus, moreover, supposes that complete absence of pain marks the limit of the greatest pleasure, so that thereafter pleasure can be varied and differentiated but not increased and expanded.” Long and Sedley translation, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* p. 174-5.

Is the act of eating a pleasure or a removal of a pain? As far as I can see it doesn't matter, since the two are the same. In answer to Don's question above, PD4 isn't saying “don't reach for that Tylenol!” Ingesting that Tylenol is going to lead to a pleasure, and likewise a removal of a pain. So is bringing to mind pleasant memories, enjoying some music or a spectacular sunset. More important than whether something is a pleasure or removal of a pain, at least for me, is “being aware of your own condition.” That way, you can make choices and avoidances proper to your specific situation. The exercise I'm proposing here and for PD3 is simply one method of practicing this awareness of your own condition.

Also regarding Don's question: I think that PD3 is actually what represents a (the!) goal, not PD4. Practically speaking, I think that we pursue pleasure in the realm of individual, sequential choices and avoidances and that PD4 is addressing this while the removal of all pain in PD3 is a pleasantly abstract ideal. This jumps out to me (maybe erroneously?) when the two PDs are combined. More challenging for me is "*Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, pain or distress or their combination is absent.*" That's something else to examine empirically in this exercise.