

An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by "Godfrey" of October 4, 2021 at 4:34 PM

I would add that an Epicurean understanding of pleasure is tied to an understanding of desires. Desires are not pleasures, and desires are integral to the conditions of one's life.

Epicurus famously breaks desires into natural/necessary, natural/unnecessary, and unnatural thus unnecessary. Whether something is natural, necessary, etc is to some degree determined by the amount of pleasure and/or pain it will cause to a specific individual. And this varies based on specifics such as the person's age, financial situation, health, culture, living situation, friends and so on.

As to your list [Kalosyni](#) I have a few comments (my numbers match yours):

1) This is a great example of the relativity of pleasures. A personal example that comes to mind is from a couple of years ago, when I was planning a garage remodel. It was "necessary" in order to carry out structural repairs, but of course there were lots of things that I thought about adding that weren't strictly necessary to solve the basic problem. So I evaluated them in terms of how much pleasure they would bring vs how much pain they would cause in terms of money, time, disruption, etc. I added some things and decided not to add others, and it turned out that the final project has solved the necessary problems but also brings me much joy beyond the utilitarian aspect of having a structurally sound garage. It's not as swanky as it might have been but it brings me lots of pleasure.

So this is how I approached this particular issue on a personal level. Another person might consider it a waste of time and money to do any work on the garage at all: perhaps they don't have the money, maybe they don't expect to live much longer, maybe they're about to move to another state. Yet another person, perhaps homeless, might be happy to live in the garage, repairs or not. And so on....

2) I think this is important, but to me it illustrates to some degree just how natural Epicurus' philosophy is. Because this is something that I think we're all drawn to do, at least on some level. If I have a pain, I try to eliminate it, whether it's chronic disease or acute hunger. You might even say that the faculty of pleasure/pain is to some degree a reflex! To me what is more important is to be as aware as possible of what pains me and what brings me pleasure and why I do the things I do. Examine the sensations and my "preconceptions" about the discomfort and use this information to follow the guide of pleasure and pain.

3) At a minimum, I would add a comma after philosophy: "Study philosophy, which leads to tranquility and peace of mind." Studying philosophy is important but it can bring up difficult truths. Eventually these bring peace of mind, at least in my experience. Maybe I would re-word this item as "enjoy the pleasure of the study of philosophy".

4) 👍

5) I would say "savor the sweetness of life as you follow the Canon".

6) This I think is more of a philosophical argument; personally I don't think about a totality of pleasure or of additional pleasures, just pleasure. I'd probably eliminate this item and end with 5).