

# An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of October 5, 2021 at 1:20 PM

1 - yes please let us know if you come up with variations/improvements of the jelly bean jar analogy. I am sure there are much better ones!

2

## [Quote from Philia](#)

It is more appealing to me to see pleasure as additive, and that is probably a heuristic.

Absolutely I agree with that, and I think most people at first glance see it that way too. That's "instinctively" the right approach, IMO. In fact I fluctuate on how much I really accept the opposite view myself. In my (admittedly small) mind, the only reason that the "subtractive" model "works" mentally is because you know that there are only two categories of feelings in the Epicurean model - pleasure and pain. I think instinctively that people suspect there is a "neutral" state in which you're feeling neither one.

I can reconcile that in two ways:

(1) There is pleasure simply in being alive (if you allow yourself to recognize it) and most all people can at least take pleasure in good memories, regardless of their current circumstances. I think that's a valid observation and I don't discount its importance. However:

(2) You can view the issue as a "truism" that flows logically from having defined pleasure and pain as the only two feelings, because then all feelings are either one or the other. I see that as a more "intellectual" approach, however, which is more suited to philosophical debate than it is to immediate analysis for someone in a bad situation. But here too I see that as a valid approach and particularly important in debating the arguments against pleasure put forth by Plato in [Philebus](#). The formula is in my mind what creates, and is the only justification for, the "absence of pain is the highest pleasure" formula. Feeling that you are totally without pain then means, by definition, that you are full of pleasure(s). But to me that is "measuring pleasure by reason" - a kind of formula has to be grasped "by those capable of figuring the problem out." I see that as an issue of measuring pleasure by reason, such as [PD19](#). "Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, *if one measures, by reason*, the limits of pleasure."

Also [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.

OK [Don](#), Philia's question has been very helpful to me here. In the future (if I can remember!) I am going to refer to the (for me) emotionally unsatisfying phrase "absence of pain = the greatest pleasure" as "**measuring pleasure by reason**" and "**a reasoned understanding of the ultimate good.**" 😊 That will probably help highlight the perspective from which that formulation makes the most sense. What do you think of that?

(In fact I am going to bookmark Philia's "It is more appealing to me to see pleasure as additive" as the trigger for me seeing the "measuring pleasure by reason" formula, and a linkage to [PD19](#) and [PD20](#), that I should be embarrassed not to have seen as a boy! 😊