

# Atlantic article about enjoyment vs. pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of May 3, 2022 at 5:28 PM

## [Quote from reneliza](#)

True, I would choose not to engage in the experience altogether, but is that original sensation still "good"? Is masochistic fulfillment "evil"? If the sheer sensations would be painful or pleasurable out of context then how do we classify them (especially as in my example where the context is initially unknown)?

Or is this just unnecessary overanalysis which I do quite enjoy?

Reneliza I did not mean to avoid the question. I was hoping some others would jump in and I hope others besides Don still will, because this is such a key question.

My basic response as hinted above is that the "good" and "bad" terminology is what has to be scrutinized. Those are very abstract terms, and they are very similar to the "virtue" question. There is a lot of discussion in Epicurean philosophy to the effect that "virtue" and "good" and "evil" are entirely relative concepts, and that they vary entirely by context.

On the other hand, pleasure and pain are sensations, and while we are experiencing them there is no mistake as to what we are experiencing.

You are quite right though that the very same experience can change from pleasurable to painful very quickly, but while we are experiencing it, pleasure and pain are given to us as perceptions which our minds do not evaluate separately. To the extent we are talking about mental pains and pleasures, those too vary quickly, but are unmistakable for the moments we are experiencing them.

I don't think I have previously addressed you personally on the suggestion to read the Dewitt book as soon as you can. It is now flawless, but it is a very good general introduction to the philosophy, and it will acquaint you with the basic issues and give you a good overview faster than any other way.

If you are an experienced reader of philosophy you can consider reading Diogenes Laertius or Lucretius directly, but I think those require significant background in philosophy before you can catch the depth of them.

You might possibly be interested in "A Few Days In Athens" as that covers your question in "story" form, but that depends on your tastes.

For now, the thumbnail summary is that Epicurus rejected over-analysis of the question of "what is the good?" and "what is the highest good?" which most of the other schools were fond of obsessing over. Epicurus concluded that the universe is entirely natural, without supernatural influence, and that the only directives of nature we are given by which to know what to pursue and what to avoid ultimately come down to "pleasure" and "pain" -- which we know without mistake as feelings.

You might well profit from reading the Torquatus narrative in Cicero's On Ends, as that too is pretty direct and understandable on this point: [Cicero's "Torquatus" Presentation of Epicurean Ethics - from "On Ends"](#)

You will quickly grasp the point that Epicurus is making, and you'll see that when he says things close to "all pleasure is good" the analysis that has to be understood is much more focused on the implications of "Good"