

PD19 And The Meaning Of No "Greater" Pleasure

Post by "reneliza" of August 13, 2022 at 9:22 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Godfrey you are saying that he is saying that because human lifespans are by nature finite then it is useless to talk about infinite time(?)

I think that is true and possibly a part of the issue, but for a man who prodes himself on clarity I think Epicurus could have said exactly that had that been the main point he wanted to make. If that was intended to be his main point, that strikes me as a "too cute" way of stating a subject on which he would likely have been deadly earnest.

Rather than me be the heavy here and always sound like I am disagreeing maybe the best way to eventually approach this is to round up some volunteer 20 to 30 year olds and run our proposals by them for reaction.

We are far from being finished with our proposals so we need more first, but my personal litmus test is whether those intelligent 20-30 year olds will say that they (1) find the proposed point understandable AND (2) find it convincing given what they know themselves regardless of what they think of Epicurean philosophy.

I am hoping we can draft [Charles](#) and [reneliza](#) and @smoothiekiwi and @Root304 and [DavidN](#) as a start. Who am I missing who is generally in that "youthful" category? If you think of others please tag them here in this thread too. I apologize if I missed someone but I am not sure of all the ages we have here.

No offense to those of us who are "aging out" but I think this is one of those real litmus test questions where people tend to gloss over taking a position by fitting it into the black box of "limit of pleasure is absence of pain", and I think it would help to get a more youthful "vigorous" perspective.

We know that Epicurus has clearly said (to Menoecus) that we do not pick the largest quantity at a banquet, but the "most pleasant." Do we not therefore think that there is something at work here in [PD19](#) other than a reference to our limited lifespan?

To call up another memory, I suspect that Reneliza's pink circles are relevant here. I wonder if she thinks they are?

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So... I somewhat doubt that Epicurus meant this exactly as it reads to me - I'm still in the process of reading DeWitt and consolidating a lot of different aspects of the philosophy. And full

disclosure, I really don't know what "if its limits are measured out through reasoning" means - I can see it having about a half dozen different and highly varied meanings.

But yes it did have me thinking about the pink circles too. The pink circles are just another version of the vessel analogy but in a way that I could see a) pleasure b) pain and c) variation, while also noting the lack of a neutral state (because there is no neutral - only pleasure and pain).

The limit of pinkness is when the circle is fully pink (pleasure) - no black (pain) or white (because there is no neutral), but pale pink, dark pink, or a swirl of both doesn't make any difference. That's as pink as the circle can get. 100% pink

This is why I don't think that variation is good (I also don't think it's bad - I think it's a neutral preference which can have positive or negative effects depending on the circumstances). If variation was preferable, then the swirly pink circle would be "more pink" than the solid pink circles, which doesn't make any sense. Pleasure isn't increased, only varied. But again! Variation isn't bad just because there's the word "only" in there. And variation doesn't *decrease* pleasure. It just also doesn't increase it. I need to stop here before I try to bring in the desires discussion again.....

Anyway, [PD19](#) also reads as a matter of percentages to me (not that I think it was meant that literally, but again my math brain wants to math things up). 100 years of life that is spent almost entirely in excruciating pain, deep depression, and all-around poor spirits, compared to 30 years of nonstop contentment and bliss is an interesting but kind of straightforward comparison for an Epicurean, but what about 100 years of consistent 80% pleasure compared to 30 years of 80% pleasure? It seems like rather than look at that as 80 years of pleasure vs. 24 years of pleasure, we look at it as 80% compared to 80% - ie, they're the same.

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Personally I think it is absolutely inadequate - and not what Epicurus meant - to try to say something like "The limit of pleasure is met when pain is absent and so therefore once you obtain painlessness for a moment if does you no good to live a longer time."

Your comment "for a moment" is off the mark. It's not experiencing "the limit of pleasure" "for a moment" then going about your day. It's experiencing the limit of pleasure as part of your whole life, you experience life with this pleasure filling your mind and body. That's why ataraxia and aponia are important components of an Epicurean life. Once you are experiencing full pleasure without mental troubles or bodily pain, it doesn't matter if it lasts a moment and you die or you live 100 years then die or live an infinite number of years and die. He says, in this state at the limit of

pleasure, "the mind does not flee from joy." There are innumerable ways to vary the pleasure, but you can't increase it once the limit has been reached. That's why - "reasoning it out" - a moment or infinity can conceivably contain the same amount of pleasure. Now, is this achievable for any being other than a god? Epicurus seems to think so because we are told that if we do, we live as gods among mortals.

...

Well, it seems to me Epicurus is saying that once we have filled every nook and cranny of our minds with peace and pleasure and rid it of fears and anxieties and troubled thoughts and have a sure confidence of not losing that, you're filled up. You can vary your pleasure, but at that point your perspective on life is unassailable, filled with joy, in fact your mind never flees from joy, that is your default mode of being and interacting with the world. Living in that way is what can make one equal to the gods.

But - this is where I would very much defer to people with greater grasp of the philosophy - it seems like you don't necessarily need to average over an entire lifespan either, and that's where the points Don was making way back in posts #3 and #5 come into play. Once you've "filled every nook and cranny of your mind with peace and pleasure" and are going about your days in a state of constant pleasure (varied to whatever degree), then what difference does it make how many years you lived before that state? If you compare the 100 year old person living a good life of 80% pleasure, day to day with a 30 year old who lived in near constant mental anguish for 29 years and 11 months, but then found a way to peace and pleasure and who recognizes his hard years, but doesn't suffer for the past, and is now living a life of 100% pleasure - then who has experienced greater joy? The person living with 20% pain or the person who has rid themselves of fear and pain and who experiences constant pleasure (again, varied to any degree) in the here and now, despite earlier years of agony?

Sorry I didn't actually answer the question, but just asked more questions.

Final point: I appreciate being lumped in with the youngish/20-30 crowd and will make no further comment about that lol