

Episode One Hundred Thirty Eight - Letter to Menoecus 5 - Pleasure Part One

Post by “reneliza” of September 8, 2022 at 9:06 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

In reading the last few posts on desire being associated with pain, I personally find it disturbing to think my life would be motivated by pain. Desires are motivating factors. Maybe not the only ones and I admit I need to think about this more. But desires motivate us to take action. If desires are initiated by pain, then is my life motivated by pain?

I would rather think my life is motivated by an appetite to move toward pleasure. I realize that could simply be rephrased as "to move away from pain" to me it's a matter of emphasis and/or perspective. Am I concentrated on the pleasure or the pain?

All that said, Epicurus did write:

By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul.

I'm still not convinced that desire (epithymia/ orexis) necessarily involves pain but I'm not saying I have a cogent alternative at this point.

I see the concern here, but my thought is that "moving toward pleasure" and "moving away from pain" are not just closely related concepts, but literally exactly identical. If pleasure and pain are the only two feelings, then having less of one means more than the other. The only way to remove pain is to add pleasure. The only way to add pleasure is to remove pain. There is no neutral state in between. There is no intermediary. So life can't be motivated by pleasure without being motivated by pain as well (more of one, less of the other)

But if it's disturbing to think of being driven by a negative, then by all means say that you're motivated to move toward the pleasure found in fulfilling desire rather than ending the pain of desire. Because they're wholly equivalent, one just feels more positive because of perspective.

^ all that said, I still hold a difference between "interests" and "desires" and having unexplored interests need not be painful, except for the necessary ones like food and shelter (and yes, the ones needed for happiness, whatever those are). "Desire" in common English means to me "wanting something I don't have (yet)" but I'm not certain that Epicurus meant to be referring to something that was inherently painful when he spoke of desires. I am not at all familiar with the Greek or even if this sort of connotation existed with the language he used.