

Welcome Quiesco!

Post by "Cassius" of April 7, 2023 at 12:57 PM

We have lots of discussion on that point because it's an interplay of practical and logical. In practice there are lots of pleasures but if you are going to be philosophical and logically rigorous and identify only one thing as the highest and best, then the common element that makes something desirable is that nature tells you that it feels pleasurable. Adding qualifiers as to type of pleasure is not logically consistent - there is only one faculty of pleasure when you get right down to it. There is no separate faculty of joy or separate faculty of tranquility, etc.

On the other hand of course we often choose painful things when that leads to greater ultimate pleasure, so we don't blindly follow the immediate pleasures that are right in front of us. We have the mental ability to look down the road, and to consider all the ramifications, and decide what ends up being of most significance to us.

If you so desire you can also state it in terms of "absence of pain," since the quantity of absence of pain equals presence of pleasure, but that too is a logical point as much as it is practical. They equal each other only in quantity and because there are only two categories of feeling, so if you are experiencing any feeling at all you are experiencing one or the other. Move the slider in either direction and you get more of one and less of the other. When you reach the end of the slider you get 100% pleasure and 0% pain, and that is what I would contend is the best way to understand statements to the effect that "absence of pain" is the "highest pleasure." Yes it is, but not in a mystical or obscure way - when you all your experience is filled with pleasures, by definition there's no part of your experience occupied by pains, and you can't get any better than that.

The ultimate reason to do anything or even be alive is to obtain pleasure, not to please gods or be "virtuous" or to be rational or to escape pain.

All of these are logical points when stated this way, in day to day life we have to do the best we can using these deductions to assist our decision-making.

Edited note: But it's interesting to observe that in the end Epicurus doesn't ground his argument on the type of logical analysis I just mentioned. As Torquatus said, Epicurus grounds his argument on telling you to look around to see what the young of all things do (before they become corrupted with false ideas). They pursue pleasure and avoid pain, and it's on this observation that we find the most important and persuasive proof of the conclusion. The logical discussion helps in talking with Stoics and philosophers, but in talking to regular people it's a matter of common sense observation of the way the world works. All the logic in the world can't prove to you that pleasure is good and pain is bad with the force of persuasion that eating ice

cream is pleasurable and desirable and going to the dentist is painful and something most people want to avoid.