

# On freedom from distress = full pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of March 20, 2019 at 6:35 PM

Thanks for the link Hiram. I could not resist responding/

What follows is the post, and then my response.

Post:

I confess I have always been a little uncomfortable with the assertion that freedom from discomfort/distress was pretty much the maximum obtainable lasting pleasure, with all the other possible pleasures being a matter of variety, but not offering greater satisfaction. It occurs to me that there might be a way of describing this that makes it much more plausible.

I have only passing personal experience with narcotics (mostly in a legit medical context) but I was impressed by a comment I read about recreational narcotic use some years back. Narcotics, it said, *provide complete satisfaction of ones needs*.

Imagine yourself on a perfect beach, in a comfortable chair, with an excellent drink in your hand. The temperature is perfect, the sun is warm and comfortable, everything is just right. This is nice. Very nice. Note that you are not really doing anything, or being stimulated in any particular way, or even indulging any of your desires. You're simply free of need; free of discomfort, distress, disorder. Everything is just right.

Sure, you'd enjoy getting up to have a nice snack, or to play volleyball, or to flirt with somebody cute. But would this really be any better, or just different?

Given the subtle challenges of translation, I'm willing to accept the possibility that *complete satisfaction of ones needs* might be a very close approximation to that which is now translated as "freedom from distress" or "absence of pain". Maybe this is what they were getting at.

Response by Cassius Amicus:

With all due respect to the original poster, this question is another example of the rabbit hole that people get into when they fail to start at the beginning and take the full context of Epicurean philosophy into account. This isn't hard at all - it is easy - what is described in the beach scene IS an example (one of innumerable variations) of the kind of enjoyable best living that anyone with common sense can see is what Epicurus was talking about.

But it is another aspect of the same problem to think that idle beach scenes are the type of indolence that alone typifies the Epicurean goal of life. As one of the subsequent posters pointed out - life on the beach is utopia and is unsustainable in real life.

What IS sustainable in real life is a a lifestyle that is planned and organized to produce as much pleasure as possible at the cost of only the smallest amount of pain that the particular individual can achieve under his or her own circumstances. That is the Epicurean formula for living over time that signifies the highest life possible and which applies to everyone and all the time.

All this is very easy and straightforward. but most people are understandably under the sway of the academic drumbeat that Epicurus was playing word games with "absence of pain" and intending something mysterious by it. If pleasure and pain are the only two feelings, as they are in Epicurean philosophy, the obviously when your experience is consumed with nothing but pleasure, then pain is totally absent by simple quantitative equivalence. That applies to any and all choices in life, but it's up to us to choose those which give us individually the balance of highest pleasure and least pain that we can accomplish.

The stoic/academic/religious enemies of Epicurus like Cicero knew exactly what they were doing when they came up with misleading arguments about the implications of "absence of pain." I am happy to think that that those miscreants damned themselves to their own miserable emotionless stoic existences.

What is very sad is that they successfully misled so many people along the way.