

Pleasure, absence of pain and PD03

Post by “Godfrey” of September 3, 2023 at 11:13 AM

This probably belongs under "posts by Captain Obvious", but I was just thinking about [PD03](#) and it occurred to me that that particular PD is, among other things, an instruction for removing pain. The reading that absence of pain leads to pleasure has the doctrine backwards. (One might credit Cicero with having a hand in this....)

[PD03](#): *The limit of enjoyment is the removal of all pains. Wherever and for however long pleasure is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental distress.* St-Andre translation

Reading the second sentence in the most straightforward way says that if you're experiencing pleasure then you're not experiencing pain. It doesn't say that the way to obtain pleasure is to remove all pain, although that's a logical implication of what is said. It's not a Buddhist idea either; it's more of a refutation of the idea that you relieve suffering by removing desire.

If one is attempting to remove a particular pain, following Epicurus' advice here may lead to a series of realizations on the nature of pleasure. One might start with a very fleeting pleasure, discover that eventually that dissipates or leads to further pain (I've sometimes referred to this as papering over pain with pleasure). Continuing to pursue pleasure in the attempt to remove particular pains eventually leads to a deeper understanding of pleasure and its optimal role in one's life. This has nothing to do with pursuing the absence of pain in order to obtain pleasure, in fact it's the exact opposite approach.