

Eat Drink and be Merry!

Post by "Cassius" of September 28, 2023 at 9:29 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

When you look at it like this, which is how it should be looked at, I suppose the first concern is to prove that there's no neutral state. This can be done in at least two ways:

Is it clear why it is important that there should be no neutral state? Maybe this is one of those areas where philosophy is "necessary" to happiness. Maybe it's necessary to reflect on things in order to be confident that there isn't a neutral state. Thinking that there is a neutral state might on its face seem harmless, but anyone who doesn't reflect and doesn't identify life in the absence of pain to be pleasurable (as many non-reflective people fail to do), is trapped with a three-category labeling system in which the relationship between the three is undefined.

Is there any harm in such a three category system?

I can identify at least one:

If you think all of life is a mix of pleasure, pain, and neutral, then what is the "limit of pleasure?" Plato asked about that limit in [Philebus](#), and I think a good argument can be made that failing to identify a limit of pleasure was the turning point in [Philebus](#) that eventually led the proponent of pleasure giving up his argument. The problem is that if you have three categories, you can't say that the limit of pleasure is the absence of pain, because you haven't dealt with the "neutral" experiences. If there are three categories then saying "absence of pain" does not tell you whether what is left is pleasure or neutrality, and as Cicero said to Torquatus there are lots of times that lots of people would say they are in neither pleasure nor pain.

If you're looking for a force of nature to compete with gods or ideal forms as your ultimate end, the argument is that it's got to have that "superlative" quality which cannot be improved by adding anything to it. Otherwise if you could add to it then it can be made better and you haven't reached the top of the mountain.

When you identify all of life's experiences as either painful or pleasurable, and you identify life as a sum from which all painful experiences have been removed, then you have logically identified an end that cannot be made better. A life that is completely free of pain is by definition completely pleasurable, and nothing can make it better - even more pleasure - because the sum you have identified is complete.

A completely wise person is the summit of wisdom, and a completely pleasurable life is the summit of pleasure.

Diogenes Laertius says Epicurus said "One wise man is not wiser than another." I think that helps us illuminate the issue too. Apparently in terms of "wisdom" there are sense in which "wisdom" can be judged to be the same across people even though they have had totally different experiences (and thus knowledge of different experiences) in life.

Maybe Epicurus is saying that this comparison as to wisdom is the same as that for pleasure. Any and all men who are "without pain" are being judged to be in the same condition of maximum pleasure, even though those those men are experiencing totally different mixtures of mental and bodily pleasures based on their individual circumstances. In saying that men who are pain-free are at the height of pleasure, we are saying nothing at all about what those men are actually doing in their bodies or mind, just that their conditions cannot be improved.

And that would be the way Epicurus would defend saying that a wise man in 2023 Athens is no wiser than a wise man in 200 BC Athens, even though their life experiences and practical knowledge is completely different from one another.

These comparisons make perfect sense and are valid, but they do require thought and the capability to figure the problem out.