

# Eat Drink and be Merry!

**Post by "Cassius" of September 29, 2023 at 2:09 AM**

At this point I would frame a sea / pleasure analogy this way:

The sea cannot feel, but for purposes of considering pleasure the sea can be considered just like Chrysippus' hand. As with the many things that a hand can be doing, the sea can be doing all sorts of things. It can be standing largely in one place, it can have tides, it can have currents, it can have eddies, it can have flows, it can be briny, it can be fresh, it can be hot, it can be cold, it can be full of life or less full, it can be cloudy or it can be clear, and on its surface it can be placid or it can be driven by the wind into waves of greater or lesser extent. Each and every one of those conditions can be considered to be pleasurable, because the sea is doing what seas do naturally without experiencing pain. It is convenient and useful for us to label "doing what a living thing does naturally and without pain" to be "experiencing pleasure." None of those conditions of pleasure for the sea are intrinsically or morally superior to any other, because all are a part of what seas normally do without experiencing pain. The fact that some conditions involve more motion or change than others has no relevance to our labeling those conditions as pleasurable for the sea, any more than whether we are waving our hand or holding it still stops us from considering all nonpainful activities of the hand to be pleasurable, just as Torquatus assumes in his hand illustration. Chryssipus wanted people to think that the hand is not experiencing pleasure unless it is being actively stimulated from the outside. Torquatus correctly explains that this criticism is effective against the Cyreniacs, but not against Epicurus, because Epicurus identifies the normal state of life as pleasurable regardless of whether outside stimulation is present.

For purposes of bringing pain into the picture we could say that it is not normal and natural for the sea to be polluted with a dump of industrial waste, and it is not normal and natural for a hand to be burned. If we collapse all the possible ways the sea can feel pain into "being polluted" and collapse all the ways that a hand can feel pain into "being burned," then we can say that unless the sea is pained by being polluted the sea is in a state of pleasure. The logical deduction that follows is that if the sea is experiencing no pollution whatsoever, then it is in the greatest state of pleasure that it can experience, which is the limit or height of pleasure for the sea. Likewise unless the hand is being burned it is in a state of pleasure, and if it is experiencing no burning at all it is at its height or limit of pleasure. This is exactly the explanation that Torquatus gives to Cicero, but which Cicero proceeds to ignore as if Torquatus had said nothing. Cicero may have ignored this explanation, but we can give him credit for including it, because by doing so he gives us a very valuable illustration as to how Epicurus actually considered pleasure to be viewed as the absence of pain. Pleasure is viewed as the absence of pain because all pain-free mental and bodily activity of life - everything we experience which is not painful - is best and accurately viewed as pleasurable.

It causes no harm for us to personally favor either surfing the waves or floating on a calm surface, so long as we recognize that both experiences are pleasurable in their own ways and have their own benefits. What does cause harm is to suggest that, as a general rule for everyone, one type of pleasure is more worthy or noble or meaningful than the other, or that only one type of pleasure is authentic, or that one type of pleasure is desirable only so we can experience another. Pitting one pleasure against another causes us to lose sight that the true importance of the analogy is to affirm that all nonpainful experiences of existence for a living being should be considered pleasurable. Once we identify that all experience in the absence of pain is pleasurable we are free to choose from the banquet, and if we do so wisely we will choose not those pleasures that are the most numerous or those that last the longest, but those we feel to be "most pleasant." (*And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant.*)

Cicero pits the bodily pleasures against the mental pleasures and thereby convinces everyone to take their eye off Epicurus' key insight. When you split the mind and body, and pit "calm" versus "intense" pleasures, and consider all the various types of pleasure to be at war with each other, you forget the big picture, and you're forced back into thinking that god or virtue or logic or idealism has to be consulted to determine which pleasures to pursue. The big picture is that in an eternity of nothingness, all of the nonpainful experiences of life should be prized as pleasurable. You yourself choose which to pursue, and you should pursue them energetically and prudently and without procrastination unless and until you confront pain that is truly unbearable and without relief. Further, you can be confident that even in the face of unbearable and unrelievable pain you will not be without resources, because you then have the option taking the situation in your own hands and exiting the theatre.

This may not be how most people normally think, but that does not change the fact that people would be better off if they did think this way, and that there is no logical reason why they should not think this way. [1]

I would say appreciation for this insight shows how so many smart people could legitimately consider Epicurus to be "godlike" and "master builder of human happiness" - even a figurative "savior." Epicurus identifies a clear and straightforward path to cleanse the jar of life. Considering all of life unpolluted by pain to be pleasurable is an attitude that removes the corruption, seals the cracks, and allows us to fill life with pleasure. The result is identification of the best possible life in a way that is understandable, achievable, and compelling to most everyone who is not corrupted or manipulated by false religions and philosophies.

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Quote from "Epicurus And His Philosophy" page 240 - Norman DeWitt (emphasis added)

"The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing."