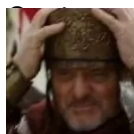


Practical Pleasure-Pain Perspectives: How Different is 99% Pleasure From 100% Pleasure?

Post by "Cassius" of October 5, 2023 at 2:25 PM

I expanded these comments in talking with Titus and I am going to take the liberty of inserting them here as they assist in the conversation.

TITUS:



[Quote from Cassius](#) "That which is free from pain is in a state of pleasure."

I definitely agree. Can you describe more precisely what you mean? Does this change anything for you?

Personally, I experienced phases with chronic pain and I can simply enjoy freedom from pain. The fixed vessel gets filled by so many beautiful impressions that there is no need for a hunt for especial amusement.

CASSIUS:

Please comment as you can cause I think this is a very important issue.

Yes, the review of how Torquatus is explaining this to Cicero is changing my perspective. In other words, if you take the position that ALL experiences in life which are not explicitly painful are pleasurable, then your sitting in your chair or whatever else you are doing (if you are not in physical pain) and your thinking about whatever you are thinking (so long as you are not thinking about anything painful) means - without any more information at all - that you are in a state of pleasure. And if you are stating to me flatly that in your present condition of body and mind while sitting in your chair you are feeling no mixture of specific pains, then you are not only in a state of pleasure, you are at the LIMIT of pleasure in your current condition.

There is no way in my mind to understand Torquatus' explanation of Epicurus, especially as to Chrysippus hand or the host pouring wine for the guest analogy, in any other way.

As DeWitt says, Epicurus is defining the "normal" state of everyday pain-free life - no matter what you are doing - as the height of pleasure. The only reason that anyone can ever be designated as not at the height of pleasure is if they are feeling specific pains of mind or body

that they can identify as painful.

It is the identification of the "normal" state - such as Chrysippus' hand - as being pleasurable that allows you to say that unless some specific pain is included in the mix you are at the height of pleasure. Nothing mysterious, nothing exotic, just the simple logic that is involved in observing that if you are feeling anything at all you are feeling either pain or pleasure. Take that to its logical conclusion and you have the realization that every activity which is not painful is pleasurable, and the height or limit of pleasure is just your personal combination of experiences so long as none of those are painful. It is ideal to hit 100% pleasures if you can, but even when you are in bad circumstances you just shoot for as high a percentage of pleasures as you can. Nothing hard to understand at all.

Quote

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[Quote from Titus](#)

Personally, I experienced phases with chronic pain and I can simply enjoy freedom from pain. The fixed vessel gets filled by so many beautiful impressions that there is no need for a hunt for especial amusement.

Yes that is absolutely true, but there is something missing from the statement when people simply focus on "escape from pain" as the reason for making the statement. The basis for any statement describing your condition is that life itself is a pleasure to experience, no matter what you are doing, so long as it isn't painful. It is desirable to remove the pain down to the last drop, but the focus and emphasis is on the pleasure of living, not the irritation of the pain. It is "Pleasure" that is the focus of Epicurus and what makes life worth living, not any aspect of "Pain."

Some are going to say that this is like insisting on saying that the glass is half full rather than half empty, but I do believe that is what Epicurus is doing.

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."

This is all very simple and common sense, but when people obsess over "katastematic pleasure" or "ataraxia" or otherwise fail to make very clear what they are saying, then most normal people are going to conclude that "absence of pain" is some kind of woo-woo

experience of mystical exaltation that "isn't pleasure at all." That's what they keep saying either explicitly or implicitly -- they are using various words for saying that this goal of "painlessness is "not pleasure at all, but the real reason for existence!" What a total inversion of the real meaning!! And it is all because they - like Cicero - refuse to accept the designation that life itself - whenever you are not suffering from some specific pain - is pleasurable!!

From the perspective I am describing, how much more clear can this quote be?

We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain.

These jokers who are saying that you don't experience true pleasure or the real goal of life unless you've removed 100% of pain keep looking for "katastematic pleasure" or "ataraxia" or "aponia" as if it some high-priced drug, when all Torquatus / Epicurus is really saying is that when you aren't for some specific reason in pain, *whatever you are doing with your body or thinking with your mind constitutes pleasure!* Rather than having to go looking for some experience that no one can really explain, he's simply saying that however you choose to live your life, unless you're experiencing some specific pain - is an experience of pleasure!

TITUS:



[Quote from Cassius](#) *That's what they keep saying either explicitly or implicitly*

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I think there is a comment in the forum from me or I wrote an essay on this topic: When another group e.g. the Buddhists experience their system of thought sometimes working, it's just because they come across the calm ocean of Epicurean Philosophy. Some of other philosophies strategies and habits may coincide with the happy life. Their main mistake is heading for alien/otherworldly experiences instead of to what Nature provides, which will finally keep them unsatisfied.

CASSIUS:

Yes I agree. Life when you are not in pain is in fact pleasurable, even if you are only sitting crosslegged on the floor staring at a candle and chanting a single word over and over.

But why in the world would you ever LIMIT yourself to that!!! If you like reading - read! If you like biking, bike! If you like cooking, cook! If you like playing football, play football! But good God man you've only got a brief time to live - don't be afraid to use it! Why not experience all the innumerable pleasures that are open to you so long as they bring more pleasure than pain!

TITUS:

Quote



[Quote from Cassius](#) *Why not experience all the innumerable pleasures that are open to you so long as they aren't more painful than they are worth!*

I would always start with eliminating pain as far as possible and then moving on according to the pleasure/pain calculus. I'm a relatively frugal, hence in my case it's rather about an openness towards my sensual experience which I gather "by the way" than being excited about exceptionalities.

CASSIUS:

Quote

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[Quote from Titus](#)

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Now there I would say that the "I would always" is a personal preference. Everyone is different and has different priorities and preferences. That takes us back to the "week as Epicurus in pain or week as an uneducated shepherd" hypothetical. Both choices are "legitimate" in that no god or Nature cares which one you choose, but different people are going to make different choices. For the sake of honesty it is essential to respect that the universe doesn't care, and not fall into the mistake of believing that our own choice is a categorical imperative for the universe of all people at large. Only you can decide what is most important to you and what you're going to

conclude is the best way to spend your life.