

Is A Fish Dinner A Better Prescription For Pain Than a Treatise of Socrates?

Post by "Cassius" of April 25, 2019 at 8:29 AM

Poster:

Cassius, this is an interesting question... I actually DO find that sensory pleasures help replace "mental pain" with pleasure.

For one thing, I can't make a full separation between physical and mental pleasure-- I think the division is imaginary. It's all happening in the body, mediated by the brain. The distinction I can make more easily is between current pleasure and remembered or anticipated pleasure-- the second category involves the brain using memory or imagination to reproduce sensory experiences.

Last night I was listening to Chopin's Nocturnes-- what an incredible thing, to be able at any time to hear recordings of whatever beautiful music we wish to!-- and the pleasure I felt was both bodily and "mental". I can't really see how it would be experienced as pleasure without my conscious mental awareness. And it was intense. I can't imagine I could have had enough multitasking ability for pain to have intruded. The pleasure I felt changed my perspective on a frustrating situation in my family, so that I saw events in a different light. This would be very much in line with research evidence on how physical states change emotional reactions to events.

At some of the most difficult times of my life, focusing on such sensory pleasures-- including paying attention to and savoring my food-- reminded me of pleasure when I thought that feeling was lost. I would not trivialize that at all. It comes dangerously close to establishing higher and lower pleasures.

We have evidence that taking a common pain reliever, ibuprofen, reduces emotional pain. These pathways are not really separate, so that doesn't surprise me.

Emotional pain is felt in the body too-- grief like an ache in the chest, etc.

I use pleasures of memory and imagined futures as well, and those are especially helpful in times of physical pain, just as Epicurus found at the time of his fatal illness. During childbirths, the anticipation of holding my newborns was very helpful, for example.

When I am sad, give me ice cream and organ music first (what a combo that might be-- I'll have to try it!), and hugs, and then it is easier for me to get my thinking in a pleasurable direction.