

Pleasure as a guide

Post by “EyalA” of March 3, 2025 at 2:02 PM

In recent podcasts i've heard Nietzsche's name mentioned here and there. As someone who is also taking interest in Nietzsche, i wanted to clarify for myself some distinctions between Nietzsche and Epicurus, and answer the question why i prefer the latter.

So i engaged in a chat with chat gpt which i found interesting -

Epicure views pleasure as the guide for the good life. Does Nietzsche has an equivalent to that.

Yes, Nietzsche has an equivalent, but it's quite different from Epicurus' idea of pleasure. While Epicurus sees pleasure (understood as the absence of pain and a state of tranquility) as the highest good, Nietzsche focuses on the will to power as the guiding principle of a flourishing life.

For Nietzsche, the good life isn't about seeking comfort or avoiding suffering, but about embracing struggle, overcoming, and self-transformation. He sees pain and hardship as necessary for growth, as they lead to the development of strength and greatness. Instead of avoiding suffering (as Epicurus advises), Nietzsche suggests that we should affirm life in all its aspects—joy and suffering alike—because overcoming challenges is what makes life meaningful.

So, while Epicurus says “seek pleasure and avoid pain,” Nietzsche might say “seek power, embrace struggle, and create your own values.”

I was not satisfied so i said: This sounds misleading. Some pleasures are obvious, and others demand integrating memory and thinking.

Yet seek power does not sound clear. Struggle might be ok for an epicurean as long as it is within the pleasure calculation.

To which he replied:

You're right to push back on that. Nietzsche's concept of the will to power isn't as straightforward as Epicurus' pleasure principle, and reducing it to “seek power” can be misleading. Let's refine this.

Nietzsche isn't just talking about political or social dominance but rather a deep, internal drive toward self-overcoming and creative expression. It's about expanding one's abilities, transforming oneself, and shaping the world according to one's own values.

Epicurus emphasizes pleasure, but not in a simple hedonistic way—it involves intellectual reflection and memory to discern which pleasures are truly worth pursuing. Similarly, Nietzsche's will to power isn't just about raw struggle; it includes art, philosophy, personal growth, and the joy of creating.

An Epicurean might accept struggle if it leads to greater pleasure and less suffering in the long run, while Nietzsche would say struggle itself is inherently valuable—not just as a means to an end, but as the process that defines a flourishing life. The good life for Nietzsche is an active, self-affirming existence where one embraces even suffering as part of the grand play of life.

Would you say this is closer to the nuance you're looking for?

And then we continued:

Yes. Much better. Is it fair to say that for Nietzsche the advice is "always seek for struggle so to improve yourself",

While for Epicurus, "look for struggle only if you calculate it will lead to a better state"?

Yes, that's a fair way to frame it.

For **Nietzsche**, struggle isn't just a means to an end—it's an essential part of growth and self-overcoming. His advice would be something like: "**Embrace struggle because it makes you stronger, more creative, and more alive.**" Even suffering should be affirmed, because it plays a role in shaping greatness. The goal isn't comfort but **becoming more**—pushing past limits, creating new values, and fully expressing one's potential.

For **Epicurus**, on the other hand, struggle is **only worth it if it leads to a better state**—meaning greater pleasure and less pain in the long run. He wouldn't reject struggle outright, but he'd say, "**Only take on challenges if reason shows they will bring lasting tranquility.**" If a struggle leads to unnecessary pain with no real benefit, it should be avoided.

So Nietzsche sees struggle as inherently valuable, while Epicurus sees it as a strategic choice. That contrast captures the essence of their difference.

This led us to a further discussion about struggle, but I'll stop here for the moment since I am probably over extending.