

The “Absence of Pain” Problem

Post by “Al-Hakiim von Grof” of April 29, 2025 at 9:41 PM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

Hmm, related question I’m pondering this morning: Is NOT stubbing your toe pleasurable?

At the potential risk of repeating concepts already shared in this thread I’ll take a stab at explaining my understanding. What follows is just *opinion* based on my understanding of Epicurus and lived experience.

To answer your question directly: absolutely. Not stubbing one’s toe is pleasurable. Not just in the nervous “rush” and laughter that happens after a near miss or just in the idea of not stubbing one’s toe, or recalling a stubbed toe’s pain and therefore being grateful for its absence.

While all of those things are also surely sources of pleasure, I’d like to assert that the natural state of the human organism is pleasure.

This concept directly contradicts most religious theologies and even lots of philosophies that start with the foundational assertion “life is suffering” or any of its variants “fallen/broken world”, or even an “evil world” that must be escaped as the gnostics believed.

I personally reject these concepts. I have seen how that insidious seed grows into a tree of mal-adapted behavior and mental anguish. It puts one at odds with the world and at its most extreme it cuts one completely off from the awesome beauty and joy that permeates existence.

Such an existence truly would be suffering, and in that way it’s practically a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Now, I don’t just reject it, as stated above, I actually believe the opposite.

I’ve always been fascinated by indigenous peoples and tribal cultures from around the world and through all different time periods. Especially when viewed in contrast with settled peoples and “civilization” - as most would view it.

What I've learned from my readings has informed my life and views in many ways, and it's the root of my current assertion.

When the human body is fed and nourished with the appropriate foods I.e. adequate calories and ample nutrients with little to no consumption of garbage food products

And inhabits an evolutionarily consistent, egalitarian social structure (the close nit tribe)

And obtains adequate levels of sun exposure, exercise, "labor", and rest/recreation/play/socialization

The default human state IS pleasure. Not just theoretically, but literally. One experiences a mild state of pleasure constantly, unless disturbed by external circumstances (injury, loss of loved one, illness, etc.)

The explorers who lived among un-influenced tribal peoples all describe individuals who are happy, contented with life, positively natured and almost always down for a good time. They're free of depression, anxiety, chronic illness, etc.

This is the natural state of the human organism - truly raw existence.

And our birthright is health of mind and body and the pleasure that ensues.

I can attest first hand to the pleasurable effect of truly adequate nutrition alone. Ever since I buckled down and made micronutrients a priority in my life, even supplementing if necessary (Vit.D as I live in the north east and a large chunk of the year is essentially sunless.) I've experience a mild and permanent state of pleasure. My physical default became feeling strong and vital. My mental default became feeling positive and happy, way more relaxed, and way more stable (able to handle the humps and bumps of life, stuff just rolls off the shoulders).

And that's just one lever. I do have family I'm close with, and great friends, and a little family of my own with a lovely wife, an infant and another one on the way (that's what I've been busy with and why I haven't posted in a while haha). That's my "tribe" so to speak. And they also bring a huge amount of pleasure - my kids especially.

Anyway, this post is a bit scattered.

I just wanted to express that I truly believe not stubbing your toe is pleasurable, because the natural state of the human organism IS pleasure.

I think almost everybody in the modern developed world walks around with some form of chronic pain - either mental or physical or both. And maybe people don't even realize how badly they feel because they haven't felt good in so long (I fell into that camp) And so the idea of "pleasure is the absence of pain" or "is NOT stubbing your toe pleasurable?" Has to be handled as some sort of theoretical discussion or abstract concept. Nah, dude. My lived experience has proven to me that the absence of pain is literally pleasurable because unless I've gone and injured myself or am experiencing some emotional disturbance rooted in some external event, I'm literally just feeling good all the time. The physical and mental embodiment of "life is good".

It just takes some prudence and wisdom to get out of the funk - out of the pain - and into pleasure.

P.S. I understand that I'm EXTREMELY fortunate to have a functional body and mind, and functional relationships (mostly), and a functional community to live within.

Not everybody has those things, and some people have none of them and that's an absolute tragedy. So I recognize that, unfortunately, it may not be possible for someone to experience mild pleasure as their default state. But with prudence and wisdom one can at least maximize the pleasure and minimize the pain and do the best they can with what they've got.

To them my words may ring hollow. But I figured it's still a perspective worth sharing because perhaps others have experienced or can experience the same as I do.