

A Discussion On Pleasure and the Zero State

Post by "Cassius" of June 19, 2019 at 9:02 AM

EC: Gaius Florius Lupus, actually, whether hunger is a pain or not depends on the person and the situation-- it is impossible for one person, from the "outside", to define pain and pleasure for another person, and this is an important feature of the philosophy- that pain and pleasure are subjective.

I only experience hunger as a pain if I think for some reason that my next meal is uncertain or will be significantly delayed beyond usual. Otherwise, hunger is part of the anticipation, and I enjoy it as a pleasure. I know from experience that waiting to eat until I am actually hungry, instead of by the clock, makes the meal much more enjoyable. As Ben Franklin said, "hunger is the best pickle."

I find this to be the case with all the necessary and natural pleasures. Sleep for instance-- it feels pleasurable to get tired and sleepy at the end of a day, unless for some reason I need to stay up instead, such as for work. Getting into bed when sleepy feels luxurious... a pleasure. Waking from sleep when I've gotten enough is another pleasure.

Our bodies have biological cycles that do not have to be occasions for pains, unless we are unable to attend to those needs when they arise.

Cassius Amicus: I agree with EC. As to this "that pain and pleasure are subjective" I agree as well. I would add that I think this too: Our individual experience of pain and pleasure is subjective, just like we individually see birds or trees or buildings depending on where we are and what direction we look.

In addition, I think Epicurus was intending to teach us that pain and pleasure also important to recognize as "faculties" just like seeing or hearing, and that is why they are placed in the canonical triad of faculties.

Everyone's individual experience is different at any moment, depending on circumstances, but it is also possible to develop a scientific understanding of pain and pleasure, just like it is possible to develop a science of optics and of audiology. We can study how pain and pleasure work to allow us to have a better understanding of the faculty, and thereby enhance them and improve their functioning, just like we can enhance the work of the eyes and of the ears with telescopes and hearing aids.

I write this comment because I think we face a major problem in discussing pleasure and pain. We discuss them today as if they are nothing more than individual discrete experiences which have no further significance, and which we can rank as "good" or "bad" as if there is some outside standard for them (religion, idealism).

But I think the more important perspective philosophically is to understand pleasure and pain as a faculty that is the one given by Nature for our guidance, and not allow that faculty to be replaced by divine revelation or the idea that logic/reason can provide "better" goals for living.

That's why Epicurus is damned from all quarters, because he is at war not only with divine religion, but with "the academy" which asserts logic and reason and "virtue" as alternate guidance systems to replace what Nature gave us.

Epicurus was not teaching a new system (such as religion or idealism) by which we should rank cookies or pies or sex or music as "good" or "bad." He was teaching us that we ourselves have a faculty, given by Nature, by which we reach those determinations without need for priests or academic experts.