

Episode 295 - Plutarch's Absurd Interpretation of Epicurean Absence of Pain

Post by "Rolf" of August 26, 2025 at 12:59 PM

Every time I think about this issue for more than a couple minutes, my brain starts to get jumbled again. It's something about the logical consistency that confuses me, I think. Here's another way of putting it:

1) There is only pleasure and pain.

2) Upon reaching the complete absence of pain, there is no room for more pleasure, only variation.

3) Let's say my hunger and thirst are satiated, my body is healthy, I have good friends, and I fear neither gods nor death.

4) This being the case, I am experiencing the absence of pain/fullness of pleasure, am I not? The jar is full. Yet this could be called a "subsistence minimum". I am not dancing, playing, watching movies, playing board games, eating fancy foods from time to time. Yet I am not experiencing pain as the lack of these things causes no pain.

5) What, then, is the response to Plutarch's argument that animals do not simply rest once these conditions have been met, but play and fly around? You say that some pleasures are more desirable than others, but if my jar is already full (by virtue of containing no pain), then how can other pleasures make it "more full"?

Do you agree that the conditions listed in point 3 are all that is necessary to experience the absence of pain? If so, and if that is the limit of pleasure, why do you also press that these things are not enough, and that Epicurus also encourages these "active pleasures" like playing and dancing?

If some pleasures are more pleasurable than others, wouldn't that make my jar "more full"? How does this fit together with absence of pain being the limit of pleasure? And if the jar can be full while containing different levels of pleasure, then what is it even measuring?

Does watching a fun movie do anything to "fill my jar"? I experience no pain from not watching the movie; my jar is no emptier without it. So watching it isn't removing any pain. And yet the limit of *all* pleasure is the absence of pain, not just the limit of subsistence pleasures.

I'm playing devil's advocate a little here in order to understand the logic. Again, I agree with the

conclusions. But I'm having trouble seeing how it all fits together. It feels almost a little contradictory.

[Cassius](#)