

Comparing The Pleasure of A Great Physicist Making A Discovery To The Pleasure of A Lion Eating A Lamb

Post by "Cassius" of September 13, 2025 at 9:13 PM

Thank you for that post Raphael! You're covering several things and I expect there will be lots of reactions to different parts.

I am inclined to want to focus on what I think is a position we share, which is that Epicurean philosophy does not in fact mean that a life of push-pin is as well spent as a life of enthusiastic pursuit of nuclear research and invention. It's because I believe that as well that I campaign against empty use terms such as "absence of pain" which can either be very profound and essential, or a straight road to decadence and disaster, depending on how (and if) one defines them.

But I think I will start with this one:

[Quote from Raphael Raul](#)

However, Epicureans maintain that all is subjective, as I was made aware of during our discussion, and objective valuations cannot be made. What Epicureans hold is in contradiction to what Epicurus actually did, which was to attempt to arrive at ideas that he developed through objective reasoning.

.. because I think you are exactly right to judge Epicureans and the Epicureans according to the active and engaged lives that they lived, and not according to the head-in-the-sand isolationism which is held up today as the Epicurean ideal.

But the real heart of the question is the role of pleasure vs reason as the guide. I gather you're concerned that it is a problem to hold reason to be a "tool" for happiness, rather than a guide toward happiness. I think the answer to that concern is found in pursuing the same line of thinking that leads you to conclude that a life of pushpins is unacceptable to you.

The ultimate issue is that "reason" alone cannot give you the answer to the question of what you "should" do without first calculating the reasonable course in relation to a goal. And only pleasure and pain can ultimately determine whether a goal is worth pursuing. No amount of reasoning can deliver the positive emotional response that you are looking for in what you are considering to be worthy goals. Only the feeling of pleasure and pain can sort out those questions in the ultimate sense. Yes we must employ reason so we can project the results of our actions based on experience, but no amount of calculation can tell us whether our goals are worth pursuing or not.

That's what I think you are hearing in those who, like Lucretius, are calling "divine pleasure the guide of life." As a guide pleasure does not reject the use of reason or friendship or virtue or any other tool toward reaching the goal, but a perspective that places "nature" firmly in the driver's seat as to what to pursue and what to avoid has to acknowledge that by nature there is only pleasure and pain as feelings of guidance.

There's of course a lot more to say and I am sure others will say it better, but I think your reaction that you see a problem is much more to be appreciated than a reaction that some might have to the effect that "i'm ok with pushpins as long as I never suffer a moment of pain!"



That attitude is NOT Epicurean.