

Sunday November 2, 2025 - Zoom Discussion 12:30 PM EST - Continuation of Discussion of Nature of Pleasure

Post by "Don" of October 28, 2025 at 12:51 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Well, what troubles me, is that quoting Epicurus, and his followers leaves the modern sensitivities at the mercy of modern language.

I find it interesting that this was *exactly* the same problem the ancient Epicureans were having. The *ancient* sensitivities were the reason that Cicero could rail against *voluptas vs virtus* (pleasure vs virtue). ἡδονή / voluptas / pleasure had the same negative connotations back then among segments of society as it does today. *Plus ça change*, and all that. And the "modern sensitivities" deriving (in my opinion) from Christian prejudices primarily, especially in the US, are directly in line with the Bible. Using Strong's Concordance for ἡδονή (The word doesn't appear too many times in the New Testament, and only twice in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible)) I freely admit this digression is primarily for my amusement in looking up the citations 😊:

2 Peter 2:13: And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it *pleasure* to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

Luke 8:13: And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and *pleasures* of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

Titus 3:3: For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and *pleasures*, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

James 4:3: When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your *pleasures*.

Proverbs 17:1 seems to be the only positive use but that gets buried in translations: κρείσσων ψωμὸς μεθ' ἡδονῆς ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ οἶκος πλήρης πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἀδίκων θυμάτων μετὰ μάχης usually translated as "Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife." (RSV) but more literally "Better is a morsel *with pleasure* in peace, than a house full of many good things and unjust sacrifices, with strife." (BES)

To paraphrase Horton (of Who-hearing fame): Epicurus meant what he said and said what he meant: Pleasure's the Good, 100%.

Epicurus had other words at his disposal, but he decided the feelings were cut into two parts: *ἡδονή* ("pleasure") and *ἀλγηδών/ἄλγος* (he uses several words for "pain"). "Negative and positive feelings" doesn't have the same *oomph*. "Good and evil" without the context of pleasure and pain doesn't mean anything. There is no absolute ideal to point to. What is evil/bad? Epicurus says it is that which is painful. If you want modern neuroscience terminology, you have negative and positive affect with low and high activation: <https://positivepsychology.com/positive-and-n...schedule-panas/> or the circumplex: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2367156/> but then you're going into the weeds in a different way.

I get the feeling Epicurus wanted to be provocative, to make people question their common wisdom, their acculturation, which is what using pleasure / *ἡδονή* / *voluptas* obviously did.