

# Discussion of Article: "On Pleasure, Pain and Happiness"

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2019 at 9:21 AM

In this context I think this is another reason why the "limit of pleasure" should be taken as a logical / rhetorical device as a way of conceptualizing the goal and sparring on logic grounds and even as a matter of reconciling us with death -- but it is not in itself a positive prescription for what to do with our own time in our own circumstances.

Just in the same way that the first PDs serve that same purpose. Having confidence that gods do not direct and and that death is nothing does not tell us POSITIVELY what to do --- they are tremendously valuable antidotes to poisonous error, but they don't tell us to eat ice cream or dance or listen to music or build a rocket ship to Mars.

I strongly think that is how we should see PD3/4 as well. They are anitidotes to poison but they make no attempt to tell us how to spend our time from moment to moment. That is the role of pleasure itself in our own circumstances - we follow the feeling of pleasure, not logical abstractions about gods, death, and "limits."

*Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?*

And to get overly concerned about the logical arguments is also probably a sign of falling into the trap of the dialecticians, as indicated by the text that immediately followed. This was not an improvement on Epicurus but a weakening in the doctrine:

*some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be*

*sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain.*

And that is just as I think it ended up being a weakening of the doctrine to accept an expansion of the criteria from three to four. Logical abstractions (which I think is what "perceptions of mental presentations" are) must be strictly kept in their subordinate place with their limitations firmly in view! :

*Now in The Canon Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions and our feelings are the standards of truth; the Epicureans generally make perceptions of mental presentations to be also standards. His own statements are also to be found in the Summary addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#).*

It may be necessary at times to focus on logical argument - and we may be in a situation that we at times have to fight on that field - but if we put logical argument in the central place of our efforts we are falling for the trap of the enemy.

It makes no difference that our logical arguments are "correct" if we see our friends and families and eventually ourselves wiped out in real life by our "enemies."