

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

Post by "Cassius" of July 15, 2019 at 1:59 AM

As we continue to discuss and refine this, I think it is very important to incorporate an explanation for why Epicurus is so concerned about "limits." Such an explanation needs to consider what is going on in PD 19 - 21.

PD 18 The pleasure in the flesh is not increased, when once the pain due to want is removed, but is only varied: and the limit as regards pleasure in the mind is begotten by the reasoned understanding of these very pleasures and of the emotions akin to them, which used to cause the greatest fear to the mind.

PD 19 Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures by reason the limits of pleasure.

PD 20 The flesh perceives the limits of pleasure as unlimited, and unlimited time is required to supply it. But the mind, having attained a reasoned understanding of the ultimate good of the flesh and its limits and having dissipated the fears concerning the time to come, supplies us with the complete life, and we have no further need of infinite time: but neither does the mind shun pleasure, nor, when circumstances begin to bring about the departure from life, does it approach its end as though it fell short in any way of the best life.

PD 21 He who has learned the limits of life knows that that which removes the pain due to want and makes the whole of life complete is easy to obtain, so that there is no need of actions which involve competition.

Unless we have a theory of the importance of "limits" that does not require the conclusion that the simplest life is the best, that is the direction that these sayings seem to lead.

And this drives me back to thinking that:

(1) the most clear way of expressing this issue is as a conflict between "maximum net pleasure vs. minimum net pain."

(2) the explanation that unwinds the problem is that the limit idea is itself limited to stating a \*theoretical\* limit of quantity alone. The "limit" theory is itself limited to its context, which is the realm of logic, and it was developed solely to refute the logical argument of Plato et al. that the highest good must be something that cannot be exceeded. It serves the secondary benefit of giving us a logical argument to reconcile us with death by helping us see that living forever

would only be repetitive, not give us access to any better pleasure than we already have had the chance to experience.

But the limits argument is subject to exactly the limitation that Elayne sees in the spreadsheet model - feeling cannot be \*adequately\* expressed in quantitative terms. It can be useful to think of it in those terms in limited situations, such as refuting Plato or planning your daily calendar, but a theory can never replace or completely capture the experience of living.

Also: Considering PD3 and 4 in this way highlights them as targeted logical arguments - targeted at specific errors - just like PD 1 is targeted at supernatural religion and PD2 is targeted at fears of death. None of these are positive statements of what type of pleasure to pursue, all of them concern obstacles to seeing pleasure as the goal of life.