

Discussion of the thread - Against Katastematic Supremacy - Pleasure Is A Unified Whole And Not A House Divided - Forum Editorial Policy

Post by "Cassius" of August 5, 2026 at 11:03 AM

NOTE: I spent a long time composing this so it does not reflect any posts by Dave or others made after #45. I'll come back to those.

Thank you Patrikios - that's what I get for writing at 2:00 AM.

Here's what i typed:

Quote

And given that what we are doing is trying to articulate a clear philosophy to help people live better, you are honestly comfortable telling people that their overriding objective in life should be "absence of pain?"

For anyone to answer "yes" to that question - remember: You would not be in this case arguing that what some would variously describe as "meditation" or "mimicing a a corpse" is *pleasurable* or a *pleasure*. What the sources are saying is that absence of pain is the *limit* of pleasure, or the *highest* pleasure, or the *greatest* pleasure. Torquatus' thought experiment to imaging the man *surrounded by numerous and vivid pleasures and the rest* clearly to me meet that test. You are saying that your single "absence of pain" description exceeds what Torquatus described?

And here's the untangled version:

Quote

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The point I was trying to make is that we're not debating whether meditation-like experiences are pleasurable. I'll grant for the sake of argument that they can be or are. What we are debating is what is the *highest / greatest / best pleasure*, meaning a target that is so great that it constitutes the goal towards which we aim everything in life. To understand meditation-like experiences in that way - as "the greatest pleasure" or "the supreme good" or "the goal toward which all our actions are aimed" is simply not a plausible argument.

And to carry the point further:

It's not a plausible argument to view the term "absence of pain" as meaning "a meditation like" or "sensory-deprived" experience. If it *doesn't* mean that, then it means something else. And that something else is not a particular "experience" at all. The reason the term is so abstract is that it was developed in the context of answering the the question "What is the good?" and the people who were debating that had accepted the premise that "the good" cannot be something that changes - fluctuates - at all. From their point of view, anything that is truly good has to be unchanging

If you're Epicurus, you have the option of saying "You're full of bull to say that the good has to be perfect and complete." And his entire physics is based on atoms constantly moving through the void and leading to constant change, so Epicurus' physics is in fact a rejection of that whole "perfection" viewpoint.

More importantly, as Epicurus argued it is not even appropriate to request a logical defense of pleasure. Torquatus starts off by repeating that Epicurus emphasized it is not necessary to look further than the senses to determine that pleasure is to be chosen and pain is to be avoided.

Here i think there is a parallel with Velleius as to gods. Velleius says that we can stop at the basics, but then he tells Cicero that the mind strives for more - to discover the "form of god":

Quote

"If we sought to attain nothing else beside piety in worshipping the gods and freedom from superstition, what has been said had sufficed; since the exalted nature of the gods, being both eternal and supremely blessed, would receive man's pious worship (for what is highest commands the reverence that is its due); and furthermore all fear of the divine Power or divine anger would have been banished (since it is understood that anger and favor alike are excluded from the nature of a being at once blessed and immortal, and that these being eliminated we are menaced by no fears in regard to the powers above). But the mind strives to strengthen this belief by trying to discover the

form of god, the mode of his activity, and the operation of his intelligence.

So how do you address the Platonic argument about pleasure fits into the "form" of the good and whether the good has to be "complete" or in the category of unchangeable "being"?

You can't accept the Platonic argument that all pleasure is tied to lack or pain or weakness, and that pleasure is nothing more than a medicine for pain, because that obviously does place it in an inferior status. The highest possible life cannot possibly be identified with nothing more than scurrying around to address annoyances like playing a whac-a-mole game.

You tell Platonists that they are wrong to think that pleasure is always tied to lack or weakness. Yes, the pleasures that derive from relieving pain or lack, such as thirst, are subject to change and fluctuation. But many pleasures *do not* stem from pain or lack at all. Classic examples include smelling roses or listening to music, but there are many many more examples.

And BOTH types of pleasure are desirable - they are not enemies of each other. The pleasures which relieve pain or lack are not *inferior to* or *the enemy of* the pleasures which you were not motivated by pain to pursue. What is common about all types of pleasure is that we find them agreeable. Pleasures feel good. So the correct logical perspective about what is the supreme good is NOT going to be found in how long they last or whether they are immortal.

What I read the whole anti-tranquillist line of argument to be moving toward (from Gosling and Taylor to [Nikolsky](#) to Austin's footnote and now to Arenson) is that the whole discussion arises from Epicurus' decision to provide a logical argument as to whether Pleasure can qualify as the supreme good. If you're like an infant or an animal or you're otherwise uncorrupted - if you are like "Hedea" in "A Few Days In Athens" - then you don't need to know the intellectual underpinnings of Pleasure as the good at all. You know it just like you know that snow is white and honey is sweet.

But if you want to play on Plato's turf and debate the issue logically, then you have to discuss the many types of pleasure (including kinetic and katastematic) and that since there are only two feelings any experience or state in which pain is absent equals pleasure.

The hazard of debating the logic of gods is that you get into sidetracks about whether gods speak Greek or Latin. The hazard of debating the logic of pleasure is that you get sidetracked into thinking that "absence of pain" means something outside the logical context in which it was developed.

And that's exactly what has been used by Epicurean philosophy's enemies to discredit it. Epicurean views of gods has been reduced to laughing about whether the gods speak Greek. Epicurean views of pleasure have been reduced to smiling about "absence of pain" as if it meant anything other than pleasure.