

Hypotheticals: Would An Epicurean Hook Himself Up To An "Experience Machine" or a "Pleasure Machine"?

Post by "Cassius" of March 23, 2020 at 2:30 PM

Despite (or maybe because) it is in the land of unicorns and centaurs, the thought experiment does serve a useful purpose, though not always with the result intended by its proponents. It does force us to take a stand on the nature of pleasure as the guide of life by dramatizing the question. Many who are faint-of-heart will draw back from the logical implications of Epicurean theory and look for a way out - a way to water down pleasure as the goal. Probably the most predominant way of doing so is to retreat to "happiness," the always-ambiguous word that means anything anyone wants it to mean. Such is also the motivation, in my mind, behind the dominant interpretation of "absence of pain." NOBODY knows what that means, so it's even safer than happiness!

I am of the opposite mindset as to Pleasure (or for this purpose, better stated as Our Patron Goddess Venus, as that will irritate the Platonists and other non-Epicureans even further):

Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead! 😊

Quote

SOCRATES: Then let us begin with the goddess herself, **of whom [Philebus](#) says that she is called Aphrodite, but that her real name is Pleasure.**

PROTARCHUS: Very good.

SOCRATES: The awe which I always feel, Protarchus, about the names of the gods is more than human—it exceeds all other fears. And now I would not sin against Aphrodite by naming her amiss; let her be called what she pleases. But Pleasure I know to be manifold, and with her, as I was just now saying, we must begin, and consider what her nature is. She has one name, and therefore you would imagine that she is one; and yet surely she takes the most varied and even unlike forms. For do we not say that the intemperate has pleasure, and that the temperate has pleasure in his very temperance,—that the fool is pleased when he is full of foolish fancies and hopes, and that the wise man has pleasure in his wisdom? and **how foolish would any one be who affirmed that all these opposite pleasures are severally alike!**

[NOTE FROM CASSIUS --- An attempt to intimidate [Philebus](#), ultimately successful, because he does not insist, as did Epicurus, that PLEASURE IS PLEASURE - ALL PLEASURE IS GOOD, BECAUSE IT IS PLEASING - " letter to Menoecus: And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided.]

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[PHILEBUS](#): You magnify, Socrates, the importance of your favourite god.

SOCRATES: And you, my friend, are also magnifying your **favourite goddess**; but still I must beg you to answer the question.

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