

PD18 - On the Limit of Mental Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2015 at 9:42 AM

LM asked me a question on the NewEpicurean page, and I put some effort into the answer, so I am pasting it here:

LM - What does this mean? I really can't figure it out, unless he's referring to, for example, when we look back on a period of unrequited sexual desire that caused us great emotional pain at the time, and now we are glad that it is all in the past.

"The limit of mental pleasure, however, is reached when we reflect on these bodily pleasures and their related emotions, which used to cause the mind the greatest alarms."

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NewEpicurean: Leonard that is an excellent question and here is what I think: Epicurus was concerned about the LIMIT of pleasure because Plato had argued that nothing that is unlimited can be satisfied, and if pleasure is unlimited, then it cannot be the guide to life. Epicurus responded that pleasure DOES have a limit, and that limit occurs when all pain has been driven away, and we experience pleasures (ordinary pleasures, not something mystical or anesthesia) to the extent that is possible for us to experience physically. (Meaning, when the senses are full of pleasure and you experience nothing but the pure pleasure.) So that shows that bodily pleasures have a limit - once you are full of pleasure there is no increasing the quantity - all you do is vary the TYPE of pleasure, which is not an increase in quantity.

The same phenomena occurs with the mind. Your mind can be close to full of ordinary mental pleasures (again, nothing mystical, and not anesthesia) but so long as fear of death and fear of the gods remain, then you are not experiencing pure mental pleasure unmixed by pain. Looked at that way, this sentence from Epicurus is very simple: the limit of mental pleasure is when ALL fear and anxiety is removed, and the most hard-to-beat fears and anxieties that cause the greatest alarm are fear of gods and of death. Defeat those fears through study of nature - remove them from your mind entirely through study - and you can experience pure mental pleasure, unmixed with any pain. And that's the "limit" of mental pleasure - after that, quantity cannot be increased, it only varies.

All of this does not establish anything mystical at all - it simply shows that Plato was wrong, and that pleasure CAN be satisfied and used as the guide of life. Nothing mystical; nothing dark; simply a clear and practical analysis that Nature has made pleasure the guide to life.

Note: This is in reference to the post I started here, but the point is separate and deserves its own point: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Epicure...47094572006171/>