

# Dialogue on Katastematic Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of February 21, 2018 at 4:16 PM

I don't think there is any doubt but that the central formula is to avoid pleasures which will create more pain than the pleasures are worth. And as a result there is going to be a bias against pleasures that are bound to create huge problems, for example, the pleasure of becoming world dictator. The action of trying to become world dictator is pretty much bound to create so much negative reaction that the resulting pain is simply not going to be worth any exhilaration in trying, at least by the calculation of most people.

But who is to say how that calculation should be made in any individual case? There is clearly no god or central point of idealistic correctness from which one can say in a godlike manner: "Thou shall not seek to become world dictator" and conclude that the rule applies to everyone, everywhere, at all times. The reason the advice is so sweepingly valid comes from the nature of people we can expect to encounter, but as there is no central enforcing agency it is possible that under certain circumstances steps toward being world dictator might be appropriate (and in this analogy I am thinking of Maciej's earlier statements that an Epicurean would always reject participation in war, which I disagree with also).

So while we can say very clearly that (1) "pleasure is the goal" and, (2) since that is the case, we should avoid pleasures which are going to create more pain than pleasure" we are still left with the observation that there is no central authority as to what pleasure is "worth" to each individual in every context. It seems to me that that calculation is ALWAYS going to be an individual decision based on the totality of that person's circumstances, and the fact that there may be a bias toward actions which generate pleasures that are sustainable, we know that Epicurus said that the goal is not the life that is the longest, but the happiest. I take that to mean that if we can gain a very large degree of pleasure from actions which are risky, it's still valid Epicurean thinking to take that risk. It seems to me therefore very justifiable in Epicurean terms to conclude that living a day as a lion, enjoying the more intense pleasures that are available to a lion, could be chosen over living a decade as a sheep, presuming that the pleasures of a sheep are less intense than those of a lion.

Another factor to consider, though, is that coming from the point of view of "unity of pleasure," then "pleasure is pleasure" and the pleasure of living in a cave chewing tobacco is not entirely different in nature than the pleasure of being an astronaut on a rocket ship to the moon. Just as I can justify the choice of being the astronaut, I think an Epicurean could justify the option of chewing tobacco in a cave. But if an Epicurean was advising someone who had to choose between the two, he would still tell that person to choose the option which leads to the happiest life, not the longest life, and the Epicurean would leave the decision in that person's hands to judge individually.

So in sum it seems to me that the important issue is to point out that the faculty of pleasure and pain is the ultimate arbiter of what to choose and to avoid, and that in itself is revolutionary and profoundly important for people to understand, so that they see that it is not gods and not abstract idealism which is the proper standard. It's much more important that people see that the choice is between "guides" to follow, and that the choice is religion vs logic vs pleasure/

pain, than it is to establish that there is a single best path among the various pleasures that can be chosen.

This is another place to mention the example of our departed friend from the Epicurean Facebook group Amrinder Singh, who died in an ultralight airplane accident. Amrinder chose to



much sooner than it might have and say that he should not have had that Amrinder lived the life that