

# Post At Modern Epicurean Blog - "Epicurean Ethics Considered And Defended"

Post by "Godfrey" of September 8, 2020 at 4:52 PM

Obviously I can't speak for Cassius, but do have some comments of my own....

I enjoyed your blog post and I think Sherman had some excellent observations regarding a state that won't allow further improvement. Personally, what made his observations so potent for me was that in reading them I was able to feel a state of complete pleasure. For me, this was beyond contentment, it was joyful. But to a large degree I think we are trying to describe the same thing. Going with that assumption, why call the goal pleasure instead of absence of pain?

When I set a goal for myself, I put it in positive terms. Likewise, in my mind the highest goal of my life should be positive, not something that I want to avoid. I'm going to think in terms of striving for good health, not avoiding getting cancer, heart disease, dementia and on and on. There's the example of "don't think about the monkeys" and then all you can think about is monkeys. So to state a highest philosophical goal in negative terms seems to be selling the philosophy short.

Another drawback, to me, of "absence of pain" is a tendency to confuse it with some sort of Zen state. As a former Zen practitioner, I see one of the beauties of Epicurean philosophy as an extremely nuanced examination of pleasure and pain on a personal level. (Actually, as one advances in Zen practice, there is examination of various states of body and mind: the "Zen state" is something of a stereotype.) The stereotypical Zen state (or whatever one prefers to call it) is actually more of a neutral state. For Epicurus, pleasure and pain are binary: there is no neutral state. Again speaking personally, I think we as a society have become desensitized to the niggling little pains and it becomes quite easy to confuse a state of contentment for a state of pleasure. Having said this, this is solved by personally developing one's sensitivity to one's feelings more than nomenclature. But I think that pursuing pleasure leads to opening to the feelings, while avoiding pain leads to a tendency to dull the feelings. The entire basis of the Canon is opening up to sensations, prolepses and feelings, so anything that leads to dulling any of these faculties is counterproductive in terms of pursuing the philosophy.

Stating the goal as pleasure has another advantage of being thought provoking, much more so than absence of pain. Once one is pursuing the philosophy it's thought provoking in a good way in that I think it's more effective in getting one to understand the nuance than is the pursuit of absence of pain, for the reason of opening to the feelings as I described above.

Lastly, to put *some* words in Cassius' mouth, I think he sees "absence of pain" as an attempt by critics of Epicurean pleasure to equate Epicurus' philosophy with that of the Stoics and others. If

so, this is a gross misrepresentation of the philosophy by said critics.