

Discussion of Article: "On Pleasure, Pain and Happiness"

Post by "Elayne" of July 12, 2019 at 5:22 PM

Please discuss the Article "[On Pleasure Pain and Happiness](#)" in the thread below (rather than in the comments under the article)

Post by "Elayne" of July 12, 2019 at 5:29 PM

Ok, that's the last of it. The differences between my perspective and Cassius, as I understand it, are:

- 1) Cassius does not think absence of pain in a living person is synonymous with fullness of pleasure. IMO this would require a third state, neutral, which I do not believe actually exists.
 - 2) Cassius proposes that the cup itself can be enlarged to admit more pleasures. I would take the position I understand meant by Epicurus saying that once the cup is full, it only admits variations.
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Post by "Matt" of July 12, 2019 at 7:38 PM

I will say that some of the metrics and visual products that have been produced lately in this forum have been exceptionally detailed. The quality of work is awesome.

I've only taken a cursory glance at the article, I'd love to take more time to look at it and dust off my Epicurean discussion skills. ?

Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2019 at 10:01 PM

I agree with the vast majority of the article. Here are my initial comments which I will try to organize according to Elayne's sections. I have included reference to Elayne's sections in the underlined headings. Then my comments on each section follow, in italics.

1. The feelings are only two, pleasure and pain—there is no true third state such as neutral, except after death.
 1. *Agreed, although after death is probably not a third state, it is non-existence.*
2. The cup analogy is not to be taken literally.
 1. *Agreed*
3. At any given moment we could see a single lifelong movie of this cup.
 1. *Agreed*
4. Only two feelings / no neutral state
 1. *Yes there are only two feelings, and there are no neutral feelings. But this does not mean that there is a feeling about everything that comes to our attention. Something can come to our attention without eliciting any responsive "feeling" whatsoever. Feelings serve as the only guide which Nature gave us to determine what to choose and what to avoid, but that does not mean that Nature gave us an indicator to choose or avoid in response to every experience that comes our way.*
 2. *What is the significance of Epicurus stressing that there are only two feelings?*
 1. *To start, Epicurus probably considered that there is no such thing as "pleasure" in the abstract. In reality, there are only individual experiences perceived by individual living things as pleasurable. The concept of "pleasure" is a model which suffers from the same deficiencies which are discussed later in this article as a hazard of model-making.*
 2. *Why articulate "pleasure" as a concept as the goal without constantly listing individual pleasures? Probably because of the logical necessity to be able to talk about the issue, and symbolize pleasures in a single word, and*
 3. *to divide feeling up into the two concepts of pleasure and pain, so as to deal with the logical arguments (such as presented by Plato in [Philebus](#)) that if there were neutral or mixed feelings, it would be necessary for there to be an arbiter to which we would have to look to separate out and rank the choices by some standard other than pleasure or pain. If we admit there is such a need for such an arbiter, then we are impelled toward the conclusion that knowledge of this arbiter is something more important than either pleasure or pain, and this would remove pleasure from its role as the highest good.*
5. Because there is no neutral, removing all pain in life is only possible with maximal pleasure.
 1. *Once it is accepted (IF it is accepted) that there are only two feelings, then this becomes true by definition. Whether someone understands the implications of this definition, however, is entirely different.*
 2. *I agree with Elayne that positing "neutrality" as a goal is contrary to experience; I would also say it is absurd.*

3. *However the point which we will need to deal is that the majority of commentators read Epicurus as implying (or stating explicitly) that this condition of "absence of pain" is (meaning is equivalent too) "the highest pleasure." The presumption which is planted is that somehow "absence of pain" results in a state of exaltation which is higher and/or more intense and/or more valuable in some way than any normal pleasures of music, food, friends, sex, dance, or any other standard mental or bodily pleasure that one can name. No one can advance any explanation of this pleasure that normal people find satisfactory, but that does not stop them from doing it. The result is Stoicism on steroids.*
6. The extent of pleasure can be maximized by making sure to attend to all parts of one's body, including the brain.
 1. *I think this section is well stated and at least at this time I have nothing to add.*
7. Happiness is itself a pleasurable feeling, most easily described as the condition of a person who has maximized pleasure in all areas of life.
 1. *I would say that happiness is a word that we use to describe a mental experience of pleasures predominating over pains. I do not think I would say that happiness requires maximized pleasures in all areas of life. I think Epicurus described himself as happy on the last day of his life, even though he was suffering excruciating physical pain. From this perspective "happiness" is a concept rather than a particular pleasurable experience or set of pleasurable experiences. I would be cautious about considering "happiness" to be an experience which is separate from some combination of otherwise ordinary mental pleasurable feeling/experiences. The further "happiness" is detached from specific pleasurable feelings, the easier it is to slip in to the definition other alleged requirements, such as wisdom or virtue or money or whatever, which other philosophers assert is required to constitute a happy man.*
 2. *As to variation, I believe Epicurus was not saying that variation is not desirable. Living another to experience more pleasures may simply be variation, but it is desirable in and of itself. I believe the references to variation are again an artefact of responding to Platonic logical objections. Epicurus was probably responding to the argument that pleasure cannot be "the good" because it allegedly has no limit by responding that pleasure does have a limit, when the allegorical vessel is full. This provides a counterargument to the logical argument of Plato, but it does not in itself diminish the desirability of variation.*
 3. *By not commenting on other aspects of this section I am not implying that I disagree with them; in general I agree with everything I read that I am not specifically commenting on.*
8. The capacity for pain is a valuable warning system and should not be disabled except in unusual conditions, but the experience of pain is to be avoided unless it is chosen for the sake of greater pleasure/ lesser pain over the lifespan.
 1. *I totally agree with this section.*

9. Humans have many shared responses of pain or pleasure to specific experiences, and they also have individual variations.
1. *I totally agree*
10. The standard of pleasure in one's life must be one's own subjective feelings, not a generic advice.
1. *I totally agree, even though I think Elayne thinks I disagree here. I will try to explain that in connection with my "Epicurean Worksheet." The major point comes down in my mind to the issue of turning feelings into abstract numbers. I agree that that is impossible. However I think that conditioning in the modern world has led most people to think that it is valid to rank feelings on some kind of "objective" or "absolute" scale. They have bought into this ranking system, even if they do not appreciate the implications of it. I think that this is a problem similar to the Platonic attacks on pleasure. Epicurus likely thought they were ridiculous, but he was surrounded by philosophy students in Athens who had heard the arguments and likely presumed them to be correct. I believe that is why he came up with the "limits of pleasure" argument in the first place, to show how the Platonic attacks could be defeated on logical grounds. Likewise I think it is necessary for some people to hear a response to attacks on feelings that defends feelings on at least somewhat "logical" terms, even though feelings cannot be reduced to logical representations (numbers). The goal of the Epicurean worksheet (which it may well not reach) is to illustrate the logical absurdity which would occur if "minimal pain" were actually adopted as the explicit goal of life.)*
11. There are many pitfalls to avoid if one desires a happy, pleasure-filled life, such as a false belief in a neutral state, practices which attempt to disable the normal capacity to feel pleasure and pain, and failure to consider the long-term pains and pleasures resulting from actions.
1. *The part I would comment on again here is the "neutrality" part. It now occurs to me that Elayne may have more experience with eastern viewpoints than I do, and that she may be right to consider that some people really do aim at neutrality, a viewpoint I find so absurd as to not take it seriously. She may be right to aim more fire at neutrality. My difference in emphasis is that I do not believe the "conventional academic epicureans" are aiming at neutrality. I believe they are aiming at asceticism / pain / obedience / regimentation as a control mechanism over other people who, for whatever reason, they deem need to be controlled.*
12. In discussing pain and pleasure, Epicureans stick to real life situations, not hypothetical philosophical puzzles.
1. *I agree with all of this!*
13. "Ok, that's the last of it. The differences between my perspective and Cassius, as I understand it, are:"
1. "Cassius does not think absence of pain in a living person is synonymous with fullness of pleasure. IMO this would require a third state, neutral, which I do not believe actually exists."

1. *I do not consider this to be an accurate statement of my position. From my viewpoint, my position is ""absence of pain" as a term is not ***sufficient*** to describe any condition worthy of being called "fullness of pleasure. In my viewpoint, this terminology has been intentionally adopted by opponents of pleasure to imply that pleasure, or fullness of pleasure, is not an "experience." It is my view that "absence of pain" was used by Epicurus as a reference to quantity, and under the system of having only two feelings, the presence of one is by definition the absence of the other. So from the perspective of quantity, yes absence of pain is sufficient to equate to fullness of pleasure. But quantity is only one aspect of the experience of pleasure, and a full definition would require much more detail to describe the full experience. Added to that is the observation that I think Elayne makes here too, that it is essentially impossible to describe a feeling via concepts / words. We can make the effort and attempt it, but no map of the real world is the equivalent of the real world itself.*
2. Cassius proposes that the cup itself can be enlarged to admit more pleasures. I would take the position I understand meant by Epicurus saying that once the cup is full, it only admits variations.
 1. *I believe the cup analogy was developed to illustrate the limit of pleasure, which is itself a logical device intended to explain how pleasure can have a limit. That limit is that the human experience, at any one moment, or over a lifetime, can have only a limited quantity of experiences.*
 2. *As referenced above I believe that Epicurus held variation to be desirable in itself, because that is just another word for additional pleasure. The point in this context is not that more pleasure is not desirable, but that our human makeup only allows us to experience so much of it, and no more, within our living experience.*
 3. *As to the question of whether the cup can be enlarged, that is a reference my interpretation of the argument by Okeefe and others that the real goal of Epicurus was moderate asceticism, and my argument that if we indeed set the focus of life as "minimizing pain" then the logical course to achieve that would be (1) suicide, and (2) failing suicide, living in a cave as a hermit on bread and water. What I am saying about a variable size cup is that we as humans do have some control over the figurative "size of the vessel" of our lives. We can commit suicide at age 20, which results in a figuratively smaller vessel than someone who lives to age 40. We can choose to live in a dark cave on bread and water staring into a flame, and in my view that does result in a figuratively smaller vessel of experiences than that of a vessel representing the life of a world adventurer of the same age. It is probably also valid to consider that the size of the allegorical vessel differs based on the mental and physical capacities or disabilities of the person involved. The word "human" is an abstraction - there are only individual living people. There is no*

allegorical "human vessel" which is the same for all individuals. This is another limitation of the use of conceptual analogies which we have to keep in mind. In discussing an allegorical "vessel of life" that vessel is not going to be of the same type for every individual, and I think it is useful also to consider that the vessel of our total experiences can enlarge or diminish based on our life choices. Once again, I think the limit of pleasure argument and the limit of pleasure issue was introduced for the limited purpose of dealing with pesky academic logical traps, and was never intended (nor could it serve) as a completely accurate summary of all aspects of pleasure. The full vessel analogy supplies us with a logical response to those who argue that the highest goal of life must have a defined "limit." The vessel analogy does not even begin to communicate the nature of the individual pleasurable and painful experiences which it must contain in order to be useful.

Post by "Elayne" of July 12, 2019 at 11:18 PM

Cassius, thank you for your comments-- it will be likely Monday before I have time to give a full response.

I will throw out there, though, that although pleasure is felt at all normal times as a response to a specific experience (as is pain), I think the activity itself is not the pleasure or the pain. My first reason to think so is that the same activity under different conditions of the same person can be pleasurable or painful. This gives the nervous system a more flexible, accurate way to indicate to us the desirability of whatever it is we are doing, in different circumstances.

The second reason I think that is the issue that under abnormal circumstances, a sensation of pleasure can be somewhat unhinged from a direct action. I can think of two ways to do this-- electrical stimulation of the brain during surgery, and drugs which bind to the pleasure neurotransmitter receptors in an abnormal way, causing prolonged feelings of pleasure with no other cause than the drug.

Although actions-- electrical stimulation and drug taking-- did initiate the feelings of pleasure, the feelings are not being produced through the normal pathways and are not serving as a useful feedback about the health and safety of the action. It is not so much that the person is enjoying the action but that artificial bypassing of the natural feedback system is going on. It's not at all the same type of pleasure-action association, neurologically, as pleasurable reading.

This is similar to a "sense of knowing", where electrical stimulation of the brain can cause a person to feel they "know something", a sense of certainty, but without any content.

I do completely agree that we know pleasure when we feel it, and that normally it's a result of activity, but not that it "is" the activity.

Post by "Elayne" of July 13, 2019 at 12:18 AM

Ha, it's thundering here, so I will write a little more.

I need to reword the death comment--didn't intend to imply that there's anything after death, just that it's the only complete end of both pleasure and pain. Until then, one or both of those is always present.

On happiness, I see I made an error-- I meant to say maximum happiness was a pleasurable feeling resulting from maximizing pleasure in all areas of life-- basically, it is pleasure of having the full cup of pleasures, or at least more pleasure than not, especially in regards to the life time "movie" of that cup. Without including maximum, I've inadvertently left out more ordinary situations. By saying it is a pleasurable feeling, I do not believe I have left room for it to be other than pleasure, and I'm not sure how that could be derived. We have all sorts of different sources of the pleasure feeling, and the response to awareness that our life's cup is mostly full of pleasure is itself a pleasure. I will say that at least that's what I mean by happiness. The feeling is the same as for other pleasures, but the stimulus is specific.

Maybe I could just reword it as "happiness is the feeling of pleasure that comes from awareness that one's lifetime cup is more full of pleasure than pain."

On absence of pain/fullness of pleasure, I am baffled by your answer-- it seems like you are disagreeing with the synonymous aspect, although you say you aren't, and I can't get a grasp on your train of thought. I would tell the person who says minimizing pain results in maximum pleasure that he is correct, and then I'd ask how he plans go go about it. If it is by withdrawing from activity, and he wouldn't listen to my advice that this will result in more pain, not less, then I'd tell him to check in with me in a year, earlier when he gets bored.

If he asked me how to minimize pain, of course it depends on the situation he is in, but I would give him ways to maximize pleasure, and tell him it is the exact same end result, and IMO, easier to approach actively by seeking pleasure than by only withdrawing from pain. But if the withdrawing did result in minimum pain, it would have worked just as well. There should be no difference at all.

I'm not even trying here to describe what pleasure feels like, if that's the issue--that's like trying to describe "sweet." If they don't know the feeling of pleasure by adulthood, I can't imagine I would be able to help them out. There isn't any sufficient description, IMO, other than by using

synonyms.

On the size of the cup... I guess this is just me seeing the metaphor differently. I don't see the cup as representing numbers of experiences but the organism's feeling capacity. I don't think it helps to imagine people's cups of different sizes, if the cup represents feelings. Because then you'd have to say, well your cup might be full of pleasure but it's too small, so you aren't having enough. And how would you know? How would you measure it, if they are saying nope, I'm in total bliss here-- how can you say they could have more, based on an outside assessment of their activities? If they aren't having enough pleasure, their cup isn't full, rather than being too small-- they still have pain.

Instead of restricted experience shrinking the cup of feeling, I would see it as the cup being in mostly a pain state, perhaps of low intensity boredom.

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2019 at 4:40 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

I will throw out there, though, that although pleasure is felt at all normal times as a response to a specific experience (as is pain), I think the activity itself is not the pleasure or the pain.

Yes I agree that is an important distinction. The pleasure is the total contextual experience as the same activity can generate pleasure or pain in different contexts.

[Quote from Elayne](#)

On absence of pain/fullness of pleasure, I am baffled by your answer-- it seems like you are disagreeing with the synonymous aspect, although you say you aren't, and I can't get a grasp on your train of thought.

I "think" our issue here is this - I am constantly switching contexts between Epicurus making the statement "maximum pleasure is absence of pain" to a student in Athens vs. the same statement being made at a philosophy department class in the world of 2019.

I am thinking that because the Athenian student would have had full access to Epicurus' views and an understanding that "there are only two feelings" and that Epicurus was campaigning in favor of pleasure as ordinarily understood, the Athenian student would never be confused. The Athenian student would know that "we would never know the good without ..." the normal

pleasures of action, so he would never consider divorcing the term "pleasure" from "normal active pleasures.

I do not believe that the statement "maximum pleasure is absence of pain" has the same contextual meaning to a 2019 philosophy student. Due to many different factors, 2019 students will most frequently infer that "absence of pain" is a reference to some kind of esoteric/mysterious state intended to mean something similar to nirvana or sensory deprivation or just simple stoic emotionlessness. As a result, I think someone today who says "the highest pleasure is the absence of pain" is probably intending his hearer to understand something very dissimilar, or even the opposite, of what Menoeceus (or any other Athenian of Epicurus' age) would understand.

I see this is very similar to "[death is nothing to us](#)." These words in 2019 in English imply flippancy; imply almost a nihilistic message that "LIFE is not important to us." I don't think that the same message would have been heard by an Epicurean Athenian of 200 BC. I think the message was "being dead is a state of nothingness - being dead is being reduced to nothing" due to the absence of sensation. Rather than a message of flippancy I think it is conveying that we have no concerns after we are dead because there is no sensation that would drive a concern. And one of the most important results of "[death is nothing to us](#)" properly understood is something very close to "life is everything to us." As I remember DeWitt saying somewhere, pain and pleasure "have meaning only to the living."

Does that explanation help bridge our issue, or make my viewpoint more confusing?

[Quote from Elayne](#)

On the size of the cup... I guess this is just me seeing the metaphor differently. I don't see the cup as representing numbers of experiences but the organism's feeling capacity. I don't think it helps to imagine people's cups of different sizes, if the cup represents feelings.

On this issue I am attempting to consider a concern that will present itself to many people to the effect that "it isn't fair" that everyone doesn't have the same size vessel of pleasure. I think this will manifest itself in many ways but maybe most obviously in comparing the life of a person who dies in childhood vs one who dies at 90 years old. Are not the feelings experienced by the 90 year old in some way larger in quantity than those of the child?

I am also concerned about the question I raised as to how we would know that the choice of living in the cave would not produce "the best life" for a human being. The minimalists will argue that by keeping the total experiences small in number, there are fewer pains, and if the pains go to zero we should acknowledge (given our formula) that this is the best life possible. Such a person might be from a background where he or she never thinks about coming out of the cave.

I do see issues in thinking about the vessel being changeable in size, so I want to think about that more, but I suspect I am going to think it best to deal with that issue as a limitation in the model, and a contextual issue, because the "person living in a cave on bread and water" is so dominant a theme in Epicurean academic commentary that I think we almost immediately have to deal with that situation using the vessel analogy in some way. And it might be useful to relate the "size of the vessel" to the part of life that is within our agency / "free will" to influence.

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2019 at 4:48 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

I don't see the cup as representing numbers of experiences but the organism's feeling capacity.

On this specific part - this is where I worry that it is important to stress BOTH that the vessel provides the limits of the capacity (meets the logic test of having a limit), but that what is contained within the vessel are many different "real" experiences (ie pleasure means pleasure and not emotionlessness). I therefore prefer to try to hit hard that the contents are food, music, dance etc -- real understandable feelings -- rather than ambiguous terms like "absence of pain." Again, the issue is more who we are talking to, and what meaning they are predisposed to hear in the term "absence of pain." For the present contexts I am thinking that 90% of the people observing our discussion will immediately think to themselves "What does he mean?" when they hear the term "absence of pain."

And not to be too harsh on "modern" students, apparently Cicero himself thought it was very effective to suggest that "absence of pain" is a worrisome term. And he was apparently right to think that, given how persuasive his argument that "absence of pain as the highest pleasure makes no sense" has proven to be. When competent Epicureans were around to explain they were probably confident of their terminology, but without them around to defend it, the argument has become devastatingly effective. Epicurean philosophy has been mutated into form of Stoicism.

Post by "Martin" of July 13, 2019 at 8:01 AM

Elayne, after reading the draft once, the content appears already fully agreeable to me except that I think that it might be possible to meaningfully quantify feelings and hedonic calculus. (I may or may not get more into this after looking at Godek's/Cassius' spread sheet.)

The major new thing for me is a clearer understanding where the limit of pleasure actually comes from. I always had problems with the cup analogy and may still have some but no more with respect to the limit. The optimum of stimulation based on the physiology of feeling pleasure explains the existence of the limit well. I was not consciously aware of that before.

I found only one mistake in language:

"The conditions for pleasure are not absence environmental input and action."

should be:

"The conditions for pleasure are not absence of environmental input and action."

Post by "Elayne" of July 13, 2019 at 8:43 AM

I think I have a way to allay those concerns about modern people not knowing what pleasure is.

1) I will add a mention that in addition to absence of pain not being a hypothetical "nothing" experience, it is also not a hypothetical type of pleasure different from what we already know as pleasure from ordinary activities. This, I believe, is another key aspect of what Epicurus said about only variation after the cup is full. It's not a different feeling.

Along this line, I disagree with the idea that a person who has deep enjoyment of a smaller variety and number of experiences and thereby achieves continual pleasure as often as anyone can is somehow having a less full cup or smaller cup than someone who enjoys a great many experiences. And vice versa-- both can be fully happy. Some of that is really just a preference. If a person in Ancient Greece couldn't be fully happy with the limited variety of availability activities compared to the much wider number of experiences to choose from now, due to technology, this philosophy wouldn't make sense. However, if the person feels a lack of variety, she has not met her personal need for it and should do more things.

2) I will add a section on the most effective practical method of minimizing pain, which is to maximize pleasure. If both methods worked as well, they would have the exact same end result-- pleasure-- but in practice, focusing on pleasure is more effective.

3) I will add a section explaining that humans are not fundamentally insatiable.

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2019 at 9:12 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

the idea that a person who has deep enjoyment of a smaller variety and number of experiences and thereby achieves continual pleasure as often as anyone can is somehow having a less full cup or smaller cup than someone who enjoys a great many experiences.

Certainly as they would perceive it their cup appears full to them, and that is what matters to them. And any additional pleasure that they would receive from engaging in a wider variety of pleasures would be, as you say, more of the same.

And yet another day of pleasure is always desirable, just as any pleasure is always desirable. I think what we are dealing with here is:

[PD20](#). The flesh receives as unlimited the limits of pleasure; and to provide it requires unlimited time. But the mind, intellectually grasping what the end and limit of the flesh is, and banishing the terrors of the future, procures a complete and perfect life, and we have no longer any need of unlimited time. Nevertheless the mind does not shun pleasure, and even when circumstances make death imminent, the mind does not lack enjoyment of the best life.

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2019 at 9:21 AM

In this context I think this is another reason why the "limit of pleasure" should be taken as a logical / rhetorical device as a way of conceptualizing the goal and sparring on logic grounds and even as a matter of reconciling us with death -- but it is not in itself a positive prescription for what to do with our own time in our own circumstances.

Just in the same way that the first PDs serve that same purpose. Having confidence that gods do not direct and and that death is nothing does not tell us POSITIVELY what to do --- they are tremendously valuable antidotes to poisonous error, but they don't tell us to eat ice cream or dance or listen to music or build a rocket ship to Mars.

I strongly think that is how we should see PD3/4 as well. They are antidotes to poison but they make no attempt to tell us how to spend our time from moment to moment. That is the role of pleasure itself in our own circumstances - we follow the feeling of pleasure, not logical abstractions about gods, death, and "limits."

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?

And to get overly concerned about the logical arguments is also probably a sign of falling into the trap of the dialecticians, as indicated by the text that immediately followed. This was not an improvement on Epicurus but a weakening in the doctrine:

some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain.

And that is just as I think it ended up being a weakening of the doctrine to accept an expansion of the criteria from three to four. Logical abstractions (which I think is what "perceptions of mental presentations" are) must be strictly kept in their subordinate place with their limitations firmly in view! :

Now in The Canon Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions and our feelings are the standards of truth; the Epicureans generally make perceptions of mental presentations to be also standards. His own statements are also to be found in the Summary addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#).

It may be necessary at times to focus on logical argument - and we may be in a situation that we at times have to fight on that field - but if we put logical argument in the central place of our efforts we are falling for the trap of the enemy.

It makes no difference that our logical arguments are "correct" if we see our friends and

families and eventually ourselves wiped out in real life by our "enemies."

Post by "Elli" of July 13, 2019 at 9:31 AM

"Absence of pain is pleasure". This is a definition which shouts out loud, and not a **description**. In general, oral and written speaking, for the descriptions, we use words and verbs that declare **motion**. What on earth of a motion has a word like "absence"? And the more some are trying to give a definition on pleasure or pain i.e. the feelings, the more they fail, and the more they are trying to speak about absolutes and the like. Because descriptions for being more **clear** have to be described with actions, and examples with experiences.

So, we see many theorizing and speaking more and more about asceticism, apathy, fantastic worlds, second life in heavens, and the like. But they are like that stupid fox of Aesop that when she saw sweet grapes, as she could not reach them, she named them as bitter. Bitter are their endless definitions.

This is the methodology of dialectis, and idealism in general that leads us to discussions without end, but the worse of all, it leads us to nihilism, inaction and slavery. The procedure of all that matters for Epicurus, it is to learn his methodology i.e. his way of thinking/acting. Humans' feelings and all the phenomena in Nature, and in our materialistic reality, can be given only by descriptions and not by definitions. Descriptions use words with as much clarity as they could, and the more the clarity they have, the more there is a human that has such experiences for understanding and the like through the **empathy**.

Time within the reality is flowing and when something happens in present it becomes quickly as a past. Observe a star and its light, it is not its present, it is not its future, it is its past.

Moreover, do you know how many deletions have been made in our brain when after a long time we are trying to give a description to a friend or even to our self about a fact that has happened to us either that fact was painful or pleasurable? Many deletions. Because our brain is focused not in the quantity but in the quality of that experience. And the quality is in self-sufficiency, in generosity, in pride of what we have achieved, and in understanding through empathy for the likes.

Once, an epicurean friend Mary Stamatiadou, who is a scientist in quantum biogenetics, she had said to me for Epicurus : Elli, there is no the issue of time in the way of thinking by Epicurus, there are no definitions in his methodology. There are no absolutes and standards in his manifold way of thinking. The only standard as the first principle, for him, is the particles

and the void. The only he is doing is to describe probabilities according to whatever we experienced in the past and what we're wishing for the present or future. To describe and at the same time to eliminate those probabilities that are obstacles to the goal of pleasure. Since, for him all the issues and the phenomena in Nature get **different values** in accordance with the materialistic reality, and the experiences in life of what we choose and what we are wishing to choose, and what we are able to choose for the goal of pleasure and eudeamonia.

"Man is the measure of all things" as Protagoras said, and this is something as a good starting point for the existential Psychology to liberate the persons from fears and lead them to more and higher conscientious thoughts and actions of autonomy. Nature has many causes and many effects and some facts/things are similar, some are not similar. What we have to focus on, to observe in, and study of, as much as we can, it is Nature, our nature with the usage of our agency/faculties as given by her, for the achievement of ataraxia and aponia that these two words are also a description of pleasure and eudaemonia, which are also addressed to whom they can't understand us. And why many can't understand us? Because they do not **HAVE it deepen in their hearts** i.e. they did not **conquer** it "ex apalon onychon" i.e. from childhood. They are not the **masters** of themselves. They live in misery and trouble and they fight to each other to climb that throne, which has for its basis mud as Nietzsche said, and as I say not only mud, but shit. 😄

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2019 at 9:36 AM

[Quote from elli](#)

But they are like that stupid fox of Aesop that when she saw sweet grapes, as she could not reach them, she named them as bitter. Bitter are their endless definitions.

Excellent!!!

Post by "Godfrey" of July 13, 2019 at 3:43 PM

For me, Elayne's comparison of pleasure/pain to atoms/void is very helpful in clarifying the discussion of pleasure and pain.

Pleasure is the absence of pain, likewise pain is the absence of pleasure.

Regarding the cup:

- Length of life wouldn't affect the size of the cup, there are just more frames in the movie of the cup.
- Everyone gets the same size of cup. If the size of the cup varies between people, it will also vary from moment to moment for a given person. There is no absolute from which to look down and measure the cup.
- IMO the simplest model is the most useful.

Great article [Elayne](#) and a really insightful discussion!

Post by "Elli" of July 14, 2019 at 6:43 AM

Stilpon of Megara

Stilpon was a representative of a smaller Socratic School of Megara, especially known for its dialectical acrobatics, claimed that is not allowed for a person to give another predicate except itself. We only say that man is man and not that man is rich, because man and rich are two different things. Stilpon attributed to the "being" completely different meaning from the real.

Thus, the epicurean Colotes with satirical mood writes :

"How shall we live really, if we cannot say a man good, neither a man Captain, but must separately say a man man and separately a good good and a Captain Captain, and if we're talking about ten thousand horsemen and fortified city, we must say that the horsemen are horsemen, the ten thousand ten thousand; and so on."

And now : "**Pleasure is the absence of pain**". The acrobatics of dialectics to define issues and things with the absence of their opposites. But above all is the separation/division in the characteristics, and that is because we do not want to give descriptions with clarity, but absolute definitions. We do not want to see that when we mix black and white, we see that there is a graduation of grey among them. No, we want the dilemmas of **either black or white**.

But the whole movie of life can't be watched in cut pieces, and when we want to define things with the **absence** of their opposites is totally false. Because, someone may also say : "life is the absence of death". Do you think so ? Because when I study the Nature I observe that life

can't exist without death. How the carnivores shall live without the death of herbivores ? And how the herbivores shall live without eating plants ? And how the Universe shall exist without fundamental interactions, also known as fundamental forces ?

But if the epicurean young man with the name Colotes would be alive today, hearing that "pleasure is the absence of pain", he could say : **How shall we live really our life, if we cannot just say that "pleasure is the supreme good, and our alpha and omega"... but we must to define pleasure in the absence of the opposite feeling of pain. And when we say pleasure we must separately divide its characteristics supreme, supreme, good good, alpha alpha, omega omega. And when we speak for the feeling of pleasure, we must say that we feel it separately in our body and separately in our soul. And when we eat our whole body separately enjoys the food i.e. separately enjoys our mouth, our throat, our stomach, our cells, our mind, our hands, and so on and so on.**

And if we talking for ALL the pleasures of our life, we must to define them separately, dividing the pleasures in motion, and the pleasures in rest. And if we are talking about the whole Universe we must speak for it in relation to time. So, we must say separately dividing it with a starting moment and an ending moment, as well as, to define and separately dividing the Universe with the up up, down down, left left, right right, and so on, and so on. 😊

Post by "Cassius" of July 14, 2019 at 7:26 AM

Elli: Given what you just wrote how do you explain to someone that the letter to Menoecus seems to say " when.. we maintain ...pleasure... we do not mean.... but freedom from pain the the body and trouble in the mind"

"When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind."

Post by "Elayne" of July 14, 2019 at 9:36 AM

Ok, here is an alternate sort of wording: "In the absence of pleasure, only pain can occur, not any hypothetical neutral state. In the absence of pain, only pleasure can occur, not any other state. This is the same as knowing that where there isn't void, only atoms will be present, and where there are no atoms, only void." And I will work on adding the other details I've proposed, such as there being no third sort of "mystical pleasure" feeling that's different from regular pleasure feelings.

I really do think this is a key point and that we should not concede any ground to confused people who think any feeling other than pleasure will happen when pain is effectively minimized.

I also continue to strenuously disagree with the idea of representing feelings in abstract numerical form, especially given Epicurus' known antipathy towards the way math was used in his time. I'm an old calculus team gal, who is very comfortable with math, but it does not belong as a representation of feelings-- I advise we must always stay with the feeling itself when deciding which result we want. Seeing that graphic with the numbers makes me cringe, lol.

However, I can include a line that there is not a consensus on this point.

Post by "Cassius" of July 14, 2019 at 9:48 AM

(1) As to the spreadsheet graphic, I want to hear what Martin has to say and I will still want to get more feedback from others. I fully agree with the problem of reducing feelings to numbers, but I think that there is a subset of people who won't cringe but who will find the exercise useful. But I could be wrong 😊 I am not sure whether there is a better way to approach it than to test it more widely. As for Elayne's objection I know where she is coming from and I appreciate it. However with other people I suspect that the hot button I am going to hit is not "how dare you reduce feelings to numbers!" but rather "how dare you suggest that minimizing pain is not the goal!" That second group is my intended target.

(2) As to the alternate wording, I do think your suggestions are helpful. However I am also thinking that (maybe in the same way as with the spreadsheet?) we are bombing different targets. I think that "neutral state" is probably not what most people are wondering about. Definitely some do worry about that, and I think "neutral state" is important for discussing the logical problem of whether there is a third feeling besides pleasure and pain. But I think most people are not thinking "Pleasure, pain, and neutral" - they are thinking that Epicurus taught "pleasure, pain, and 'a higher pleasure he called ataraxia." They aren't fascinate by it because it is neutral, they are fascinated by it because they think that he was describing some kind of

"higher" pain. On this point I don't generally like to discuss untranslated greek words because I think that obscures the issue, but in this context maybe we should talk about "ataraxia" because that is part of the Okeefe game. Not only imply that it something higher than pleasure, but always give it the fancy Greek name to imply that they have some kind of esoteric knowledge that no one else has.

Post by "Elli" of July 14, 2019 at 11:13 AM

As I said in the past, in this paragraph Epicurus does not use the words "freedom of pain" or "absence of pain", he uses "neither - nor" next to the verbs "algein" and "tarassesthai" in the grammatical form of greek language that declare motion i.e. activities. Pleasure is to do such actions e.g. study the Nature, celestial phenomena, and our nature and on the basis of our personal limits to not feel pain in the body and disturbance in the soul. To maintain a pleasure I have to do something i.e. maintenance of pleasure depends on our activities and similarly to chose a pain and then minimizing this pain is for the achievement of a greater pleasure. Prudence and the study of Nature teaches us where to set our personal limits, in accordance with the experiences and the reality and the society we live, and how to use tools as called virtues to live a pleasant life. This is the way that goes the hedonic calculus in the Canon that includes both of our feelings pleasure and pain, and not a neutral state of anesthesia or amethexia that leads to apathy and the decadence of any society.

We have to realize also that Epicurus speaks for gradation among pleasure and pain, as well as, all the things/issues get constantly different values depending of what we choose to do for the achievement of the goal of pleasure. For this the division on pleasure to kinetic and katastematic pleasures is not given by him anywhere. The only he speaks is for eudaemonia and this is how he starts his letter to Meneoceus and how he is ending it : when we do not possess eudaemonia we do EVERYTHING to win it. This is the art to live like gods among men.

Imo the behavior of a profligate is the same behavior with that one that says he is is humble and live in simplicity and frugality. Both such behaviors are antisocial and without limits, both they produce pain. And both declare men that are not the masters of themselves, both are slaves recognizing other masters than themselves. Eudaemonia is not an issue that is possessed by them (ex apalon onychon) i.e. from childhood , because for the achievement of eudeaemonia first you have to possess yourself and that means self-sufficiency and self-restrain, (egratia) that is synonym with freedom and bravery, because your goal is pure pleasure that its limit is neither to feel pain in the body nor agitation in the soul.

Post by "Cassius" of July 15, 2019 at 1:59 AM

As we continue to discuss and refine this, I think it is very important to incorporate an explanation for why Epicurus is so concerned about "limits." Such an explanation needs to consider what is going on in PD 19 - 21.

PD 18 The pleasure in the flesh is not increased, when once the pain due to want is removed, but is only varied: and the limit as regards pleasure in the mind is begotten by the reasoned understanding of these very pleasures and of the emotions akin to them, which used to cause the greatest fear to the mind.

PD 19 Infinite time contains no greater pleasure than limited time, if one measures by reason the limits of pleasure.

PD 20 The flesh perceives the limits of pleasure as unlimited, and unlimited time is required to supply it. But the mind, having attained a reasoned understanding of the ultimate good of the flesh and its limits and having dissipated the fears concerning the time to come, supplies us with the complete life, and we have no further need of infinite time: but neither does the mind shun pleasure, nor, when circumstances begin to bring about the departure from life, does it approach its end as though it fell short in any way of the best life.

PD 21 He who has learned the limits of life knows that that which removes the pain due to want and makes the whole of life complete is easy to obtain, so that there is no need of actions which involve competition.

Unless we have a theory of the importance of "limits" that does not require the conclusion that the simplest life is the best, that is the direction that these sayings seem to lead.

And this drives me back to thinking that:

(1) the most clear way of expressing this issue is as a conflict between "maximum net pleasure vs. minimum net pain."

(2) the explanation that unwinds the problem is that the limit idea is itself limited to stating a *theoretical* limit of quantity alone. The "limit" theory is itself limited to its context, which is the realm of logic, and it was developed solely to refute the logical argument of Plato et al. that the highest good must be something that cannot be exceeded. It serves the secondary benefit of giving us a logical argument to reconcile us with death by helping us see that living forever would only be repetitive, not give us access to any better pleasure than we already have had the chance to experience.

But the limits argument is subject to exactly the limitation that Elayne sees in the spreadsheet model - feeling cannot be *adequately* expressed in quantitative terms. It can be useful to think of it in those terms in limited situations, such as refuting Plato or planning your daily calendar, but a theory can never replace or completely capture the experience of living.

Also: Considering PD3 and 4 in this way highlights them as targeted logical arguments - targeted at specific errors - just like PD 1 is targeted at supernatural religion and PD2 is targeted at fears of death. None of these are positive statements of what type of pleasure to pursue, all of them concern obstacles to seeing pleasure as the goal of life.

Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2019 at 2:10 AM

Sometimes the most important thing we can do is to forge ahead and force discussions on topics that the masses have been taught to fear, or to reject. Sometimes diplomacy doesn't work, and attacking those errors head on is the only way to free ourselves "from the prison of public education and politics."

Maybe that is why Epicurus chose this "confrontational" method of presentation. It certainly seems to me today that the way forward will not come from discussing food and wine and music and dance, but will come only through direct confrontation with errors that are held very dearly by "the public" - errors that people are often afraid to discuss.

That "fear to discuss" is the real prison of public education and politics.

Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2019 at 2:21 AM

It doesn't seem reasonable to us that some logical argument by Plato would be as worrisome an error as supernatural gods or suffering after death, but then, we are not living in Athens in 300 BC devoting our life to teaching philosophy, surrounded by a den of logicians who held that the meaning of life can be expressed in numbers and geometry and calculated limits.

Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2019 at 2:38 AM

Speaking of the context of looking to numbers and geometry for the meaning of life, Cicero in On Ends does not seem very interested in that topic. Is it possible that Cicero was able to argue that Epicurus' discussion of limits of pleasure did not make sense because he knew that in the intervening 200 years the philosophical emphasis on geometry had dissipated? Or that the Romans were simply not impressed with the Platonic / Pythagorean fascination with the mystical significance of numbers and limits?

Certainly today the whole issue of "that which is best must be of a type which has a limit" is not something we hear much about.

However in Epicurus' day, issues of quantity and limits were considered crucial. We see that here from [Philebus](#), where Socrates lays the trap of which ultimately defeats Protarchus, the advocate of pleasure as the goal. Here Socrates lays the foundation that things which can always be increased are "in the class of the infinite.". This later compels Protarchus to say that because pleasure can always be increased, it is in the class of things that can be better or lesser - and this means that Pleasure cannot be in the class of things that can be " best.":

SOCRATES: Then, says the argument, there is never any end of them, and being endless they must also be infinite.

PROTARCHUS: Yes, Socrates, that is exceedingly true.

SOCRATES: Yes, my dear Protarchus, and your answer reminds me that such an expression as 'exceedingly,' which you have just uttered, and also the term 'gently,' have the same significance as more or less; for whenever they occur they do not allow of the existence of quantity—they are always introducing degrees into actions, instituting a comparison of a more or a less excessive or a more or a less gentle, and at each creation of more or less, quantity disappears. For, as I was just now saying, if quantity and measure did not disappear, but were allowed to intrude in the sphere of more and less and the other comparatives, these last would be driven out of their own domain. When definite quantity is once admitted, there can be no longer a 'hotter' or a 'colder' (for these are always progressing, and are never in one stay); but definite quantity is at rest, and has ceased to progress. Which proves that comparatives, such as the hotter and the colder, are to be ranked in the class of the infinite.

Post by "Cassius" of July 15, 2019 at 7:27 AM

And so that we can throw everything into the pot before we cook it --- in addition to the above on "limits," you have the closely related issue of "purity."

PD12. It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he doesn't know the nature of the universe but still gives some credence to myths. So without the study of nature there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

Here is another excerpt from [Philebus](#) that I think explains why purity is an issue. If you take the following sentence, and instead of “whiteness” you read “pleasure,” you see some immediate implications for why Epicurus was concerned about the purity of pleasure, and why it is very important to discuss pleasure unmixed with any pain whatsoever. Take this sentence and try that:

*SOCRATES: * True, Protarchus; and so the purest white, and not the greatest or largest in quantity, is to be deemed truest and most beautiful?*

PROTARCHUS: Right.

To me you get almost a direct reflect of the first part of PD3 when you do that; “PD3. The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain.”

Here is more context to give you the background:

SOCRATES: And now, having fairly separated the pure pleasures and those which may be rightly termed impure, let us further add to our description of them, that the pleasures which are in excess have no measure, but that those which are not in excess have measure; the great, the excessive, whether more or less frequent, we shall be right in referring to the class of the infinite, and of the more and less, which pours through body and soul alike; and the others we shall refer to the class which has measure.

PROTARCHUS: Quite right, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Still there is something more to be considered about pleasures.

PROTARCHUS: What is it?

*SOCRATES: When you speak of **purity** and clearness, or of excess, abundance, greatness and sufficiency, in what relation do these terms stand to truth?*

PROTARCHUS: Why do you ask, Socrates?

*SOCRATES: Because, Protarchus, I should wish to test pleasure and knowledge in every possible way, in order that if there be a **pure and impure element** in either of them, I may present the pure element for judgment, and then they will be more easily judged of by you and by me and by all of us.*

PROTARCHUS: Most true.

SOCRATES: Let us investigate all the pure kinds; first selecting for consideration a single instance.

PROTARCHUS: What instance shall we select?

SOCRATES: Suppose that we first of all take whiteness.

PROTARCHUS: Very good.

*SOCRATES: **How can there be purity in whiteness, and what purity? Is that purest which is greatest or most in quantity, or that which is most unadulterated and freest from any admixture of other colours?***

PROTARCHUS: Clearly that which is most unadulterated.

*SOCRATES: True, Protarchus; **and so the purest white, and not the greatest or largest in quantity, is to be deemed truest and most beautiful?***

PROTARCHUS: Right.

We can do the same substitution exercise with this example from Socrates: "How can there be purity in [pleasure/whiteness], and what purity? Is that purest which is greatest or most in quantity, or that which is most unadulterated and freest from any admixture of [pain/ other colours]?"

Answer: "clearly, that which is most unadulterated."

So the implication of the analogy is that the purest/highest pleasure is not that which is the greatest quantity, but that which is unadulterated with pain, just as the purest white is not the most quantity of white, but that which is not mixed with other colors.

Does that mean that because sleep, for example, is frequently something that gives us pleasure without any mixture of pain, we should consider sleep to be the highest pleasure and sleep as much as possible?

I don't think so. Once again, i think that Epicurus is dealing with "pure pleasure" in a way that shows how logical arguments that pleasure as a faculty cannot be the guide to the best life, not calling us to select only those simplest activities which produce only pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of July 15, 2019 at 7:35 AM

In both the quantity and purity issues I have collected the references that seemed to me to be most relevant at this page: <https://newepicurean.com/foundations-2/...pleasure-model/>

With these four graphics as an aid to focusing on the issue:

When-Only-The-Best-Is-Good-Enough.jpg

Selection_182.jpg

Selection_470-1-1024x274.png

Selection_471.png

To these I would now add my draft net pleasure maximization worksheet - [A Draft Epicurean Pleasure Maximization Worksheet](#)

These graphics and these points don't do nearly enough to explain the issue in full, and I hope that the article Elayne is drafting will in the end bring all the different points together in a coherent whole.

Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2019 at 7:46 AM

So to condense these last posts down into a concrete suggestion, I am suggesting that the article should probably contain a section something like:

Why does Epicurus talk about limits of pleasure and purity, what does he say about them, and what was his conclusion about how these matters affect our pursuit of pleasure as the goal of life?

We are today in much the same position as Epicurus in 300 BC. We know these arguments are being used against holding pursuit of pleasure as the goal of life, and not only in their original form. The original form of the argument is still being used, with this new addition: Epicurus' own statements seem to say that we should limit pleasure to the purest and least painful forms. If that interpretation is accepted, Epicurus himself seems to be laying the groundwork for living in a cave on bread and water.

If we don't address the arguments that we know are on their way, then we haven't equipped members of the Epicurean school to defeat them.

Post by "Cassius" of July 15, 2019 at 10:33 AM

Here are several clips from [a chapter of Gosling & Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure"](#) which appear relevant.

First, this one may seem to be a little confusingly written, but the context here is that G&T are saying that they are opposing ALL of the views stated in the rest of paragraph, and not just the views stated in the second part of the first sentence. The second and following sentences are a continuation of the view that they oppose, not a statement of their own views. G&T are opposing all the views stated in this paragraph, as made clear by the final sentence, which states that they are going to provide four objections which "such views" have to meet.

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They conclude in the end that the Katastematic /Kinetic distinction was **not** important to Epicurus, and that gave [Nikolsky](#) the idea for his article cited later in this post:

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Here is a clip stating that Cicero's interpretation that there is an internal conflict is defective and can be explained away. Note that G&T say that Cicero's interpretation "**is not supported by the extant writings of Epicurus**" and "**attributes views to him [Epicurus] which ought to be surprising.**"

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And here is the most clear statement of the Gosling & Taylor conclusion: "what is important is to get a life of sensory pleasure untainted by pain." (a reflection of Cicero's "*nothing was preferable to a life of tranquillity crammed full of pleasures*" from Defense of Publius Cestius)

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neutral state,
 d of their own

exactly the same place, making it fit his argument. From this we can conclude that Athenaeus' report goes back to the same doxographic tradition as Cicero's text and therefore cannot be regarded as an independent and reliable piece of evidence.

In my view, all the facts examined above testify that the Epicurean concept of pleasure differs from the way it is represented in Cicero and Diogenes Laertius. Epicurus is far from seeing pleasure in a neutral state – a state in which both pain and usual, positive kind of pleasure are absent. Nor does Epicurus have all those contradictions of which Cicero accuses him and which are related to the division of pleasures into kinetic and static ones. One gets the impression that Cicero and Diogenes try to impose this division on Epicurus, reading it into phrases the actual meaning of which is absolutely different: Diogenes finds it in a sentence which is in fact dealing with the physical and emotional side of any pleasure, and Cicero, in his turn, infers it from the two characteristics of pleasure – as the absence of pain and as a pleasant movement perceived by the senses. Having attributed the distinction between the two kinds of pleasure to Epicurus, Cicero tries to find it in some other utterances by the philosopher as well. For example, Torquatus in the first book of *De Finibus*, right after his statement about two kinds of pleasure, quotes Epicurus' words:

*omnis autem privatione doloris putat Epicurus terminari summam voluptatem, ut postea variari voluptas distinguique possit, augeri amplificarique non possit.*⁷⁸

According to Torquatus, Epicurus says here that static pleasure is the supreme form of pleasure and when it is achieved, sensory kinetic pleasures can only impart variety to it, but cannot increase its magnitude.⁷⁹ However, as Gosling and Taylor justly notice,⁸⁰ Epicurus' phrase itself says nothing

And here is [Matthew Wenham](#) reaching the same conclusion, that pleasure is an EXPERIENCE / sensation of pleasure, not some kind of "static" / "katastematic" state from which feeling is absence.

On Cicero's Interpretation of *Katastematic* Pleasure in Epicurus

Mathew Wenham

The standard interpretation of the concept of *katastematic* pleasure in Epicurus has it referring to “static” states from which feeling is absent. We owe the prevalence of this interpretation to Cicero's account of Epicureanism in his *De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum*. Cicero's account, in turn, is based on the Platonic theory of pleasure. The standard interpretation, when applied to principles of Epicurean hedonism, leads to fundamental contradictions in his theory. I claim that it is not Epicurus, but the standard interpretation that generates these errors because the latter construes pleasure in Epicurus according to an *attitudinal* theoretical framework, whilst the account of pleasure that emerges from Epicurean epistemology sees it as *experiential*.

Post by “Elayne” of July 15, 2019 at 7:45 PM

[I have finished my second draft](#)-- took me 6 hours! I think this one says everything I want to say. If more academic addendums need to be added at the end, I am fine with that but am probably not the person to write it.

I have to say I am especially thrilled with my new and snarky term "fancy pleasures"-- I hope it gives somebody a laugh. I think Epicurus would have liked it.

[LINK TO THE SECOND DRAFT](#)

Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2019 at 8:14 PM

OK comments from here are directed at draft two. I will post several here as I read through for the first time.

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Ataraxia is freedom from anxiety and emotional disturbance, sometimes called "tranquility"

Should this be: "Ataraxia is a feeling of freedom from anxiety and emotional disturbance, sometimes called "tranquility.""

[Quote from Elayne](#)

If you are having a feeling and are not 100% sure that it is pleasurable, it is not pleasure. Pleasure is unmistakable. Even a newborn can feel it.

Would this be true of pain too? Are we introducing an ambiguity by implying that there are feelings which we cannot tell are either pleasure or pain? How would we explain that?

[Quote from Elayne](#)

What are Pain and Pleasure?

It is not necessary to mention this but as I finish reading this section I see you are discussing things I think DeWitt classifies under the "unity of pleasure" -- that pleasure is all of a similar type (as I gather pain is too)

Post by "Elayne" of July 15, 2019 at 8:29 PM

I will fix the ataraxia sentence.

I do not think it is ever a confusion whether someone is having pleasure. But there is definitely a confusion, which I have observed in person first hand and would be unwilling to argue against, of people not recognizing low grade pain for what it is. They can have what is clinically termed "alexithymia", inability to describe a feeling. I have never, ever observed this with pleasure. When I question the confused person who doesn't know what their feeling is, after some time I can help them realize that it is an unwanted feeling, which means it is a pain. As I mention in the paper, sometimes they are just so used to pain that it is like water to a fish. They have forgotten there is an alternative. But people in pleasure don't forget they are happy.

They can habituate to an experience in regards to pleasure, but not to the feeling itself.

I don't know why this is the case, just that it is definitely so. It isn't that there is a 3rd feeling, but maybe pain is confusing to people in some way that pleasure is not?

I think by saying the feelings are two that I don't need to say pleasure is of a similar type, otherwise there would be more than two.

Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2019 at 8:40 PM

It is possible that some of this issue of "low grade" feeling may be explainable by referring to the greek wording, and perhaps [Elli](#) could help us with that. I gather we are talking about some variation of "Pathos" and I sometimes wonder if there is a distinction between Pathos/feeling and "sensation." Does every sensation generate a pathos/feeling? Does everything that comes to our attention generate a pathos/feeling? Or is part of the natural programming of pain and pleasure is that it does not weigh in on EVERY experience? Just because every pain or pleasure is an experience, does that mean every experience generates pleasure or pain?

Post by “Elayne” of July 15, 2019 at 8:43 PM

Ah-- if you see the link and small discussion I put in the end notes, about how the brain works-- I know of zero evidence that the pain/ pleasure function of the brain ever fails to weigh in at any time in life, on anything that comes to our attention, but the intensity of feeling can certainly vary. It would be a pretty extraordinary assertion that sometimes pain/ pleasure shuts off-- I would need some replicated research to be willing to say that. And it would be against my personal experience entirely. So that is one of the points I mentioned we didn't have consensus on.

Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2019 at 8:48 PM

OK as to the issue of whether every experience generates a discernable feeling of pain or pleasure, I do not have a strong opinion or reason to argue for or against that. My perception is

that the ultimate issue is just that nature gave us feelings of pain and pleasure as a guide, and not any other kind of feeling for a guide, so I don't think it is necessary philosophically to take the position that every experience must generate a registered feeling of pain or pleasure. I guess I have an open mind as to whether this might explain your reference earlier to feelings which we might not be sure are pleasure or pain. But I don't think this causes any philosophical problem so I doubt it is a significant issue.

Post by “Elayne” of July 15, 2019 at 9:58 PM

Cassius, oops-- I don't think I should say ataraxia is a feeling of freedom when I've just said there are two feelings, pain and pleasure-- freedom is not a third feeling. Obviously most of us use the word feeling much more loosely in conversation, but here I've used a strict rule. I either need to label it as a pleasure itself, due to freedom, or a "condition of freedom", or some other revision. I'll check in the morning and see what you think.

Post by “Cassius” of July 16, 2019 at 12:53 AM

Maybe the "pleasurable feeling of freedom..." or something to that effect (?) With the point being that ataraxia is a subset of pleasurable feelings , (it's something like a mental feeling of being without any disturbances at all), and not a separate type of "fancy pleasure" on its own,

Post by “Martin” of July 16, 2019 at 9:21 AM

Elayne, after reading the second draft once, the content appears again fully agreeable to me.

I found 2 mistakes in language:

"I could say that I am honest to avoid the painful anxiety lies coming from lies ..."

should be:

"I could say that I am honest to avoid the painful anxiety coming from lies ..."

"grabbing a hot pain on the stove"

should be:

"grabbing a hot pan on the stove"

Post by "Elayne" of July 16, 2019 at 12:07 PM

Great, thanks! A hot pain, lol!! I have fixed those things.

Post by "Elli" of July 17, 2019 at 5:04 AM

Our epicurean friend Elayne wrote : **They can have what is clinically termed "alexithymia", inability to describe a feeling.**

WOW ! "alexithymia"... that's a greek word of that clinical situation that can also give the "apathy" of the stoics and stoicism. HA 😊

Alexithymia :

"Alex" means "I repel" or "I push back". That's how we have and that name "Alex+ander" that means I repel, or I push back "men".

and "thymos-thymia" which means [the emotion] or [the passion]. "Alexithymia" means I repel my emotions, and that's the same with APATHY which means I uproot, I push back my emotions. And why I **am in the clinical situation of apathy or alexthymia**? Because "ex apalon onychon" i.e. from childhood, something enforced me to not make properly the measurement among pleasure and pain, something did not make me clear where are my limits among pleasure and pain, and of others limits too. Something enforced me to do my "**duty**", and accepting my "**fate**" or "**necessity**". And that "something" is an authenticity i.e. my parents and then people - as leaders - of my social environment, and this is NOT for purpose to lead myself and others in pleasure and happiness, **but for being a virtuous guy.** 😊

And now for a+taraxia that goes along with a+ponia.

this (a) means [without]

ataraxia means without agitation.

aponia means without pain.

ataraxia and aponia are words that describe the limits of magnitude of pleasures i.e. the situation that consciously I understand/feel with my body/mind/soul as the feeling of **pleasure**.

Again the PD 3 : The limit of magnitude of the pleasures is the removal of everything painful, wherever there is pleasure, however long it may present there no pain or sadness of both together.

Or

Pleasure reaches its maximum limit at the removal of all sources of pain. When such pleasure is present, for as long it lasts, there is no cause of physical nor mental pain present - nor of both together.

Or with the fg 423 Epicurus addressed to peripatetics : "What brings unsurpassed joy is the removal of a great evil; and this is the nature of the good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm, and do not stroll about chattering emptily" .

Like the words "aponia" and "ataraxia", in greek language, we have the word "a+lithea". This "a" means [without] , and "lithe" which means [oblivion]. "**Alithea**" means the situation that is without oblivion. And in english is given with the word "truth". For the word "lithe" [oblivion] in english and greek languages the synonym words are "unconsciousness", "insensibility", "a stupor" "stupefaction", "senselessness", "a coma", "a blackout". That's why we call senses and feelings the criteria of "alithea" [truth] inside the methodology of the epicurean Canon.

Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2019 at 6:54 AM

Thinking about this discussion in clinical terms reinforces in my mind that this entire line of thought is as simple as can be. The lives of most people contain a mixture of pleasures and pains. The way any person improves their life to the best possible is to remove the pains he faces and replace them with pleasures. Nothing more complex or mysterious whatsoever is expressed or implied.

And no one would even think of saying anything so basic unless they perceived that there was a contrary viewpoint which required the obvious to be stated.

I am convinced also that we find that contrary viewpoint in "[Philebus](#)" and that we need to spend more time articulating it clearly. Not because the argument in [Philebus](#) is persuasive, but because unless we are aware of it we tend to think "there must be something more going on here than meets the eye."

And there is.

We are going to find at root that the [Philebus](#) issue is a "logic game" involving the alleged insatiability and insufficiency of the feeling of pleasure as the guide of life, and its alleged inferiority to "reason."

But there is a lot more work to be done to explain that. Only then can we reclaim PD3 and similar statements as the validation of our patron goddess "Venus" (as referenced in [Philebus](#)) rather than a call to asceticism.

Post by "Elayne" of July 17, 2019 at 11:07 AM

Elli, do you think I need to re-word the part about ataraxia to be more clear?

Post by "Cassius" of July 17, 2019 at 11:44 AM

i went looking for that part and will need to look further. Maybe the word is so important that it deserves a section heading of its own?

Post by "Elli" of July 17, 2019 at 11:49 AM

Elayne, please if you would like make the statement that [aponia] and [ataraxia] are words that give the description of the magnitude of the limits of pleasure, and for making more clear the description, make a reference of the PD3, as it was translated in my above text.

PD 3 on the limits of pleasure serves as the cornerstone for all further elaborations on the Epicurean understanding of pleasure and pain: the limit of the various, particular pleasures is

the relief of the respective, corresponding "pains". For this, epicureans do not speak about "moderation" and "golden rule", but they always speak about limits, that are personal.

For the epicurean understanding of both, what is meant here is neither the ecstasy of delight nor the agony of torture, but the natural everyday activities of our personal experiences. For example, once one has eaten enough, one is no longer hungry. Logically, for as long as one continues to feel full, one is not hungry; nor, of course, can one feel both sated and hungry all at once. Since there is a graduation for this of our bodily procedure. Epicurus closes the argument snugly with a glaring reduction ad absurdum.

As well as, he goes on a crucial tangent, saying that this very same principle applies not only to pain in the strictly physical sense, but also to "that which causes sadness", or mental/emotional distress. This analogy between e.g. the "pain" of hunger and the "pain-trouble" of anxiety, or stress, or grief, has momentous ramifications in Epicurean ethics. Since, for Epicurus, the body/mind/soul is one and the same thing.

Epicurus' says that pleasure is as easily attainable as satiety in the course of attending to our everyday, natural needs: we can "fill" ourselves with ongoing emotional wellness just as easily as (and provided that) we can satisfy our hunger, thirst, and need of shelter and safety on a daily basis. The main core of this doctrine is that - through our sober reasoning - when we banish mere opinions and empty beliefs to which are due to the greatest disturbance of our mind/soul, so then, it's easy to understand consciously what makes us feel pleased and bliss.

Post by "Elli" of July 17, 2019 at 1:27 PM

AND HERE IS THE WHOLE ISSUE : We have to understand what were the issues that Epicurus had confronted, in his era, - and not only in his era, but what issues we have to confront in our era too - and we have to realize also that the following is only a small excerpt of what Epicurus had heard and read about philosophical issues.

Here is a small excerpt by Aristotle's Eudemica that is taught by theologians and philologists inside the greek schools, till today (sick).

"It is said that the virtue of temperance concerns pleasures and sorrows, but it is actually limited to the first (pleasures). Initially, the pleasures of the intellect are excluded, for the people who become slaves of them they are never characterized as profligates/punishable (my note : WOW and thrice WOW). Also, the pleasures of vision, hearing, and smell are excluded. The virtue of temperance concerns only those sensations that provide direct enjoyment to both

inferior animals and humans, namely touch and taste. Besides, not all the pleasures of touch and taste are included, but only the purely of inferior animal ones (my note: oh, my goodness, here Aristotle separates the senses of touch and taste in lower and upper level !!!), and those are the pleasures from food, drink and aphrodisiacs (my note lower are the pleasures for food, drink and aphrodisiacs, so you are going straight to asceticism).

The only sorrows that are concerned with the temperance are those due to the unfulfilled desire for these pleasures. The ideal life, according to Aristotle, lies in the action that corresponds to the virtue of wisdom: "«ὥστ' εἶη ἄν ἡ εὐδαιμονία θεωρία τις» and that means : that the goal of eudeamonia is for theorizing on the view (contemplation) of the Absolute Truth about the eternal being (THE GOD). (My note : ABSOLUTE TRUTH, JUSTICE, and GOD only in their stupid head had existed, exists and will exist).

After the reference in the above, the teacher inside the schools makes the parallelism with the following excerpt by saint Maximos. And here we the epicureans understand the root of the decadence that is followed by the stoicism and its evolution the christianism.

Saint Maximos ("his holly grace"), he directly inspired by the Socratic-Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, argues that: in

order to succeed the knowledge of God and virtue, there are many that are demanded, such as discharge from passions/emotions, patience in temptations, virtues logoi (my note : virtues logoi are the mere opinions, empty beliefs to which are due to the greatest disturbance of our mind/soul), realization of modes of salvation, disconnection of the mood of the soul from the flesh, alienation of feeling from its relation to the senses, perfect departure of the mind from all creations and generally all that contribute to abstaining from evil and ignorance, since without the synergy of Grace of God, the virtues lose their true meaning, but without the consent of the believer, the grace of God remains fruitless.

(My note : I have anything more to say, I remain shocking and speechless !!!) 😂😂

Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2019 at 2:01 PM

"We have to understand what were the issues that Epicurus had confronted, in his era, - and not only in his era, but what issues we have to confront in our era too "

How would you summarize the issue in a few words?

That there is an effort to convince everyone that there is a goal higher than pleasure, and that that pleasure is mental contemplation, which is a food in itself? And that the attempt to focus

on absence or pain or other ambiguous mental concepts is an attempt to nudge / restrain us in that direction?

We need multiple ways of saying this but it is essential that it be brief and understandable.

Post by “Elayne” of July 17, 2019 at 2:27 PM

I am pretty sure my term "fancy pleasure", as I explained it, takes care of the idea that there is something other than regular pleasure.

But I will revise the ataraxia part as Elli suggested and probably put in another section-- I think in my own words, I have described exactly the situation of ataraxia/ aponia elsewhere, but I see why it is a good idea to have a specific section to cover it.

Not sure I will have time to get to this until Saturday, but I will do it before next week for sure!

Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2019 at 6:08 PM

This task could consume all our attention so we have to make a decisions on how far to go and how not to go.

Also: I am not sure how much reading Elli has put into [Philebus](#), so she may know more about this than I do, but I am going to try to absorb at least the commentary on [Philebus](#) that starts the standard English translation, by Benjamin Jowett. I copied the Gutenberg version and [placed it here](#).

Already I see this point below ,which I think is related to what we have been discussing as the target which PD3 and "absence of pain" are intended to address. But this observation from Jowett lends more specificity.

The point made here is that when we see the ancient Greeks discussing the issue of "infinite" or "something which has no limit," we should be thinking not wholly in terms of extent, but in terms of "definiteness." If Jowett is correct, Plato's problem with pleasure being infinite is not so much (or not only) that it can never be quenched in extent, but that it is INDEFINITE; UNTHINKABLE; UNKNOWABLE; OF WHICH NOTHING CAN BE AFFIRMED; CHAOTIC;..... The very act of placing Pleasure in the category of those things of which there are lesser or greater

amounts paints it with all sorts of negative implications which could not possibly be consistent with the ultimate good of life.

That would mean that in asserting that pleasure has a limit (the full extent of the individual's experience) then Epicurus is saying that pleasure as a goal is "definite," "thinkable," "knowable," "capable of being affirmed," "ordered," etc.

This is fully consistent, but a deeper slant, with the idea that the vessel can be filled in quantity. This would go further and affirm that pleasure is something that is not only attainable, but definite enough to be understood, at least in terms of it serving as the goal / guide of life.

Quote

The first of Plato's categories or elements is the infinite. This is the negative of measure or limit; the unthinkable, the unknowable; of which nothing can be affirmed; the mixture or chaos which preceded distinct kinds in the creation of the world; the first vague impression of sense; the more or less which refuses to be reduced to rule, having certain affinities with evil, with pleasure, with ignorance, and which in the scale of being is farthest removed from the beautiful and good. To a Greek of the age of Plato, the idea of an infinite mind would have been an absurdity. He would have insisted that 'the good is of the nature of the finite,' and that the infinite is a mere negative, which is on the level of sensation, and not of thought. He was aware that there was a distinction between the infinitely great and the infinitely small, but he would have equally denied the claim of either to true existence. Of that positive infinity, or infinite reality, which we attribute to God, he had no conception.

The Greek conception of the infinite would be more truly described, in our way of speaking, as the indefinite. To us, the notion of infinity is subsequent rather than prior to the finite, expressing not absolute vacancy or negation, but only the removal of limit or restraint, which we suppose to exist not before but after we have already set bounds to thought and matter, and divided them after their kinds. From different points of view, either the finite or infinite may be looked upon respectively both as positive and negative (compare 'Omnis determinatio est negatio') and the conception of the one determines that of the other. The Greeks and the moderns seem to be nearly at the opposite poles in their manner of regarding them. And both are surprised when they make the discovery, as Plato has done in the Sophist, how large an element negation forms in the framework of their thoughts.

Jowett raises lots of issues and problems contained in [Philebus](#) which I don't begin to understand, and I haven't even read through his commentary once. But all this fits in the category that I would loosely refer to as "Why is Ataraxia/Aponia Important?" / "Why are Limits

Important?" / "Why Talk in Terms of Absence of Pain Rather than Positive Pleasures?" / "Why PD3 and Related Comments Do Not Make Epicurus an Ascetic" /

It also helps fit PD3 and PD4 in the same category of "antidotes" such as PD1 and PD2 which help us understand the context of enemies Epicurus was facing:

(1) Why would one be concerned about false doctrines of divinity unless false priests were spreading mischief? And what is the doctrine that serves as the antidote to all such allegations? The true nature of divinity as perfection and self-sufficient)

(2) Why would one be concerned about what happens after death unless false priests were spreading mischief about a heaven and hell? And what is the doctrine that serves as the antidote to all such allegations? Death is the end of sensation and all evil must come through sensation.

(3) Why would one be concerned about whether pleasure has a "limit," or about defining pleasure as "absence of pain," unless false philosophers were spreading mischief that (1) pleasure is unlimited and therefore indefinite and insatiable and not competent to be the highest good, and (2) that pleasures can be divided up and ranked and categorized so that we can through reason alone decide which are worthy of choice? And what is the antidote to all such allegations? That the feeling of pleasure has a definite end-point which we can understand (A. that we can fill our experience with pleasure, after which we have no further need of MORE pleasure, and B. that there is a unity of pleasure in that all pleasure is pleasing, so we can choose any activities (and not just those deemed "worthy," which to us seem pleasurable as a way to fill up our vessel / expel all pain.)

Post by "Elayne" of July 20, 2019 at 6:13 PM

Ok, I have inserted a section on Aponia and Ataraxia. I had actually already referenced PD 3 just prior to where I inserted the new section, so I have removed that reference to consolidate things and replaced it with PD 3 in the new section. Happily for me, this meant I didn't have to re-order my end notes!

This results in hitting on the "only two" aspect several times in different sections, but I think this is such a critical point that it is better to repeat it in different ways.

So you don't have to go back and hunt for that section, here it is below. Elli, what do you think?

Ataraxia and Aponia

I have mentioned ataraxia as a word commonly misunderstood by neo-Epicureans. Some neo-Epicureans make the mistake of thinking ataraxia is a “fancy pleasure”, and they put this new interpretation of Epicurus' words as their goal instead of the real life pleasure he recommended. Because Buddhism has become a fad for many Westerners, I have seen some conflate detachment - part of the way Buddhists see tranquility—with ataraxia. This leads neo-Epicureans to think that they should not seek pleasure but just take a detached perspective on life and not get ruffled. They may think this is “fancy pleasure”. It is not pleasure—it is a disconnection from reality which leads to pain.

So what is ataraxia? What are those neo-Epicureans missing? Ataraxia is the Greek word for "without agitation", and agitation is pain of the mind. Ataraxia is paired with aponia, "without pain" of the body. If you apply these descriptions, without pain of body and mind, to your cup of feelings, it should be clear by now that you will be left with only pleasure of body and mind, not some alternative to pleasure or pain. Remember, there are only two options, pleasure and pain-- not three options, pleasure, absence of pain, and pain.

A person with ataraxia and aponia is enjoying the full wellbeing of pleasure, the most pleasure humanly possible, in their entire body and mind! And this wonderful feeling is available to us during the course of many ordinary days in an ordinary human life, if we plan wisely.

From now on, when you read commentary saying Epicurus wasn't advising actual pleasure but just to be untroubled, as if there is even the possibility of freedom from pain and agitation which is not wholly pleasurable, you will know that writer has completely and thoroughly misunderstood Epicurus.

When you read PD 3 in this light, you will have an accurate understanding: "The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body nor of mind, nor of both at once"(6).

Post by “Cassius” of July 20, 2019 at 7:15 PM

I like that a lot! Elli and others?

Post by “Elli” of July 23, 2019 at 11:03 AM

Elayne, frankly this is outstanding. Εύγε/Bravo and that is because you also give many examples which show how much rightly you have grasped and the concepts of greek words as ataraxia, aponia, autarkea, and eudaemonia that describe only the pleasure that is a feeling which springs from the inner self and can be preserved and feed back with the presence and the safety that we share with our friends. The first principle of friendship is the common benefit and through the empathy we are able to understand and to help/benefit each other in life.

I promise that when I 'll have free time I translate it into greek language to become known among the greek epicurean friends. It is like to hear some of them saying : hooray, we found an epicurean lady who lives abroad and without knowing the language of gods, she understood perfectly what Epicurus had said. Yes, we found such an artist who knows the most important art that is: " to live like a goddess among men". And that's all folks <http://pf.gy/0b9c5f>

Post by “Cassius” of July 23, 2019 at 11:13 AM

Just to take the burden of clicking through off the table, this is the graphic Elli linked:



Post by “Elli” of July 23, 2019 at 11:16 AM

The graphic is a gif that is moving. <https://data.photofunky.net/output/image/0.../photofunky.gif>

Post by “Cassius” of July 23, 2019 at 11:17 AM

photofunky.gif
Image of type unknown

There we go!!!! I inserted it with the "image" button -- and put the URL link in the pop-up box!

[Elli added:]

...And if you change just the name in Epicuru's letter that is addressed to Leontion, you have :
"O Lord Apollo, my dear Elayne, with what tumultuous applause we were inspired as we read your paper-work".

Post by "Cassius" of May 19, 2020 at 2:19 PM

On May 19, 2020, new user [Jon M](#) posted:

Feelings and Kinds of Feelings

Hello, I am new here and am not quite sure how to use this Forum. Never mind.

I will introduce myself by making a comment on Elayne's excellent article 'On Pain, Pleasure, and Happiness'. I notice no one has commented on it for a while.

I have a suggestion for a tweak in her terminology.

Elayne, you quote Diogenes Laertius X.34 saying "the feelings are two, pleasure and pain" which is a literal translation, but Hicks translates "They [Epicureans] affirm that there are two states of feeling, pleasure and pain".

My guess is that he says there are two 'states' of feeling because to say there are two feelings (only) is counter to normal usage. In everyday speech we have lots of feelings: I feel warm, I feel angry, I feel flu-like, and so on.

Diogenes Laertius was a racy kind of tabloid-newspaper writer, and perhaps did not pick his words like a careful scholar. Also he is not saying Epicurus said this, only 'they' ie the Epicureans. So I feel happy, like Hicks, to tweak him.

If you say that pleasure and pain are two *kinds* of feelings, then this gets you out of lots of issues.

First it is more in keeping with normal English: I feel warm and it is pleasurable, ie pleasure is the kind of feeling it is. I feel angry and it is a painful kind of feeling.

More importantly, it allows you to talk about neutral feelings, which you and Cassius had some discussion about.

What I think you are saying, using my language, is that there is no third *kind* of feeling, often called 'neutral', neither pleasure nor pain.

I can agree that there is no third kind of feeling, while accepting the neutrality of my having no particular feelings about something. Certainly I will have no conscious feelings attached to the large number of inputs to my senses every second that I am not conscious of. And surely there are lots of things in the periphery of my consciousness that I am neutral about. I don't care one way or the other about that cup that my eyes have just glanced over.

But if my brain decides that any experience is salient enough to be picked out and focused on, then I will have one or more feelings about it, and of all the feelings I might have about that thing they will be divided into two kinds: pleasurable and painful.

I agree completely then that it is not productive to focus on the neutral or to try and be neutral. To blank out all feelings and remain conscious is impossible, and to attempt to find a third *kind* of feeling that is neutral, (*adukkham-asukhā*, as the Buddhists say, neither painful nor pleasurable), is what you call a 'fancy pleasure', a dead-end street leading to pain and quite counter to Epicurus.

This has become a long first post, but thanks to you and Cassius for maintaining a splendid website. It is good to see such high-quality writing about Epicurus all in one place.

-- Jon M

Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2024 at 4:45 PM

Almost four years later, I still think [this is one of the most useful articles on the website](#), so today I added it to the "[Articles](#)" section where it will be easier to find. I see this is one of the most-read articles on the website, and as I read it today it still strikes me as a very good summary of where I think most of us are on this topic.

I also added this note below to Elayne's footnote five. I would have to go back through this thread to see what I was thinking at the time, and so far I haven't been able to figure out whether we ended up agreeing after discussing the issues. But no matter where we ended up in the past conversations, I am footnoting the final article so it will be clear that I think Elayne was correct in the comment to which she notes me as objecting:

02/12/24 Admin Edit From Cassius: Today I am reposting this article to the "Articles" section, and in seeing this footnote it appears to me that Elayne is correct about this. I will go on record now that I think Elayne's comments here are correct, and that she is stating the Epicurean position based on what Torquatus explains in *On Ends* Book 2: If we are aware of anything at all, that awareness is either pleasurable or painful.