

# Thoughts on continuous pleasure, hedonic regimen

Post by “Godfrey” of August 29, 2019 at 8:45 PM

I’m working on digesting DeWitt, Gosling & Taylor (having some indigestion with this one) and Wenham regarding katastematic and kinetic pleasure. Trying to get beyond the academic and into the practical day to day. So I’m putting some thoughts down to help me in the process and putting them here to see if they hold up.

Wenham seems to be spot on in describing pleasure as “experiential” as opposed to “attitudinal”, and supporting this with the fact that pleasure is a Feeling and a part of the Canon.

Regarding katastematic and kinetic pleasures and whether or not Epicurus defined them in this way, I confess that I’m a bit lost. Since I’m not writing this for academia but for my own pleasure and it’s growth, now I’m just putting down ideas (hopefully coherently) that came up while reading DeWitt’s The New Hedonism.

What is definitely attributable to Epicurus seem to be the ideas of continuous pleasure and unity of pleasure. Thinking about my experience of continuous pleasure leads me to times when I have been troubled by something and have, usually through extended effort, managed to solve the problem. Examples: 1) I spent years trying to figure out the most prudent way of saving and investing. It was (and still is) a great relief when I finally did a period of intense research and decided on and implemented a strategy that works for me. 2) Similarly for chronic health challenges: after extended periods of trial and error, finally arriving at a solution provides mental as well as physical relief/pleasure. 3) Being at a transitional period of my life, I embarked on an extended period of reading and introspection and in the process discovered Epicurus’ philosophy which has relieved much mental disturbance and brought much pleasure.

Is there a point where kinetic pleasure becomes continuous pleasure? Each of these examples (finances, health and philosophy) involves continued maintenance. If the maintenance is neglected the pleasure eventually vanishes. This is how I am understanding condensation (or more accurately extension, as it’s opposite) of pleasure.... A natural and necessary desire by it’s nature is recurrent (eating, drinking, etc.); autarchy is achieved when prudently considered continued effort, carried out through a what could be called an hedonic regimen, allows one to reach a place of continuous pleasure. At this point the natural and unnecessary pleasures provide the icing on the cake.

In other words, continuous pleasure requires continued effort and action. Over time, I think, the effort diminishes although the action involved may continue. Using my examples above: 1) Having settled on a strategy for my finances, there are “chores” which I perform weekly, some

which I perform quarterly, and some that I do every six months. Notably the chores aren't necessarily pleasurable in themselves, but they do lead to pleasure/peace of mind. 2) Having found a solution to a chronic health problem, one must continuously monitor one's diet, exercise, sleep, take one's meds if applicable, etc. 3) Similarly, philosophy requires continued reading, contemplation and ideally discussion to really take root and flourish.

So pleasure is pleasure. Some pleasures are the result of continuous effort, some are more immediate. Some are mental, some are physical. Some pleasures are attained by removing things (fear of the gods, fear of death, other mental disturbance, illness, etc.) and some by obtaining and/or consuming or doing things (food, water, reading a good book, going skiing). Some are necessary for life, some make life more fun. Taking care of things that pain our bodies or disturb our minds brings us pleasure: health and serenity are our natural states and feel good. When our bodies and minds are free of pain and disturbance we can especially enjoy other pleasures, particularly if they outweigh any pain involved. As the sky has much variety but is all the sky, so goes pleasure.

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## **Post by "Cassius" of August 29, 2019 at 10:15 PM**

You're touching on many many things Godfrey. Some points / questions:

1. You mention Dewitt, Gosling and Taylor, and Wenham. Mentioning Wenham tells me specifically that you have read Wenham's point that pleasure is an "Experience" and that it makes no sense to discuss a pleasure that is somehow not experienced. So we are together there.
2. You mention G & T. I presume you are reading their chapter on K & K that is here in the forum, and not the whole book? If so, keep in mind that while it is good to read that chapter, it is a part of the much longer story of Greek views of pleasure to that point, so you're necessarily "starting in the middle."
3. As to DeWitt, i think I probably know the references you mean.
4. You do not mention [Nikolsky](#). If you will add that to the pot at some point, he does the best job of describing where the division came from (Carneades) so that adds perspective and takes away the otherwise perceived necessity of making Epicurus fit into that box.
5. Also, to add to the maze (I am afraid) I really think it's critical to become at least superficially familiar with the thrust of [Philebus](#). There you will see Plato/Socrates arguing against pleasure as the good in full force, and I think THAT is probably the essential background as much as anything else. Unless we start with the knowledge that the Greeks prior to Epicurus were arguing directly against pleasure being a candidate for "the good" we can make the major mistake of thinking that Epicurus thought that the issue was "a given." In fact it appears to me the opposite was true. Yes Epicurus was giving us

who accept the legitimacy of pleasure tips on how to live more pleasurably, but he had a more basic and important goal first -- to establish that pleasure can even be considered as a legitimate goal.

6. So if 5 is true as I think it is, the continuous pleasure part (and this is something DeWitt points out) was intended as a logical argument against Plato more than it was something that was intended as a "practical tip"

(I better save this for a moment - I will add more)

So then YES - I completely agree with this! -->

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

So pleasure is pleasure. Some pleasures are the result of continuous effort, some are more immediate. Some are mental, some are physical. Some pleasures are attained by removing things (fear of the gods, fear of death, other mental disturbance, illness, etc.) and some by obtaining and/or consuming or doing things (food, water, reading a good book, going skiing). Some are necessary for life, some make life more fun. Taking care of things that pain our bodies or disturb our minds brings us pleasure: health and serenity are our natural states and feel good. When our bodies and minds are free of pain and disturbance we can especially enjoy other pleasures, particularly if they outweigh any pain involved. As the sky has much variety but is all the sky, so goes pleasure.

And I think that is a large part of exactly the conclusion we are supposed to draw, in response to Plato saying that pleasure cannot be the goal because it cannot last (the continuity aspect) and also that some pleasures are of an entirely different type than others (and therefore we need "reason" in order to distinguish and rank them).

And so therefore I think that while the points made here are true ----

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Using my examples above: 1) Having settled on a strategy for my finances, there are "chores" which I perform weekly, some which I perform quarterly, and some that I do every six months. Notably the chores aren't necessarily pleasurable in themselves, but they do lead to pleasure/peace of mind. 2) Having found a solution to a chronic health problem, one must continuously monitor one's diet, exercise, sleep, take one's meds if applicable, etc. 3) Similarly, philosophy requires continued reading,

contemplation and ideally discussion to really take root and flourish.

..... I think it would be a mistake to think that these are the primary reasons that Epicurus made these points. The primary reason for the discussion is that in response to the attacks of other philosophers, "pleasure" must first be established as the legitimate goal in philosophical terms.

In other words we COULD just choose to observe that all young animals, before they are corrupted, pursue pleasure and avoid pain, and we could say "That is all the evidence I need" and the disengage from the philosophical argument as a waste of time.

But Epicurus lived in Athens where the schools were competing, and rightly so, for intellectual dominance, and he was not going to give up the field of intellectual warfare when he saw that he could defeat them on their own terms, and satisfy the intellectual needs of his students to understand why Plato and the others were wrong.

So in sum my point is that yes I think your conclusions as to practical application are correct, but do not forget the background of the argument and why the discussion is needed in the first place. If not for the negative programming we have all received from religion and ascetic philosophies, much of this issue of pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain would all be pretty much a matter of "common sense" that a child would be ashamed not to understand.

So it is important not to let the medicine intended to cure the philosophy students trip us up into thinking that there is some art here that is not pretty straightforward. I think it's easy to do that, and to think "Why is he saying all this?" "Surely this is obvious -- he must mean something mysterious. " And I think the answer is again as Torquatus said, that Epicurus was teaching something very simple, but which he expressed in egghead terms in order to help deprogram the eggheads -- which hopefully we can all see and not need after we understand the proofs:

*If then the doctrine I have set forth is clearer and more luminous than daylight itself; if it is derived entirely from Nature's source; if my whole discourse relies throughout for confirmation on the unbiased and unimpeachable evidence of the senses; if lisping infants, nay even dumb animals, prompted by Nature's teaching, almost find voice to proclaim that there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain—and their judgment in these matters is neither sophisticated nor biased—ought we not to feel the greatest gratitude to him who caught this utterance of Nature's voice, and grasped its import so firmly and so fully that he has guided all sane-minded men into the paths of peace and happiness, calmness and repose?*

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**Post by "Godfrey" of August 30, 2019 at 1:32 AM**

Regarding your points Cassius:

1, 3: Yes, we're in agreement.

2: I did read the chapter and much of the discussion seemed to depend on references of which I'm unaware. It's good to know why!

4: [Nikolsky](#) sounds like a valuable piece of the puzzle, I've downloaded that and will read it.

5, 6: I generally understand that Epicurus was responding to Plato and others but I haven't read [Philebus](#) and probably should find a Cliff Notes version to get the general idea. However I never considered that this was Epicurus's *primary* reason for discussing things as he does. Sitting here in 2019, studying philosophy of living, my motivations are far removed from philosophical competition. So it's quite helpful of you to point out his context. DeWitt does that quite a bit, but when reading his book I'm focused more on understanding the philosophy than the context.

#### Quote

If not for the negative programming we have all received from religion and ascetic philosophies, much of this issue of pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain would all be pretty much a matter of "common sense" that a child would be ashamed not to understand.

This sentence of yours is exactly spot on! My frustration when writing this, which I couldn't articulate, is that it IS common sense. But at the same time the reason for my frustration is a lifetime in a culture inundated with religion and ascetic philosophies, so context, both of antiquity and of today, is indeed valuable.

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### Post by "Cassius" of August 30, 2019 at 6:59 AM

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

So it's quite helpful of you to point out his context. DeWitt does that quite a bit, but when reading his book I'm focused more on understanding the philosophy than the context.

Yes Godfrey as I think about it, that may be one of the most important ways that DeWitt's book seems to be different from most other "overview" books.

When I have read the others, they tend to focus exclusively on outlining the major ideas while giving very little attention to the context, and that doesn't work for people who have no idea of the context. To me at least, many of the [Principal Doctrines](#) make no sense whatsoever without seeing the as responses to other philosophical positions. Even as quickly into the list as PD3 and PD4, I believe most "normal" people are going to be bewildered as to why Epicurus wrote in such a seemingly choppy and clipped way.

With probably my primary example being PD3 - "The limit of quantity of pleasure....." I contend that without an understanding of why "limits" and "quantities" were considered relevant to pleasure (which is "explained" in [Philebus](#)) Epicurus' choice to place such a statement near the head of his list "is Greek to us." And the same for PD4, which seems to be a ridiculous assertion if taken literally rather than directed toward the continuity issue. And "[death is nothing to us](#)" seems flippant and contradictory to other provisions of the philosophy unless you realize that he his attacking issues of the alleged afterlife.

While we still largely understand the context of the issues of gods and death, so that PD1 and PD2 continue to be intelligible, much of the rest is directed against specific philosophical problems which are not taught (or at least taught in the same way) anymore, so many people skip over them despite their importance.

DeWitt's approach (pursue in much finer grain detail by Gosling & Taylor, is the only way to pick up the lost meaning.

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**Post by “Martin” of August 31, 2019 at 2:28 AM**

Thanks to both of you for this excellent discussion!