

Are You Epicurean Or Hieronymian?

Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2019 at 2:08 PM

According to Doctrine 3, Epicurus held that the limit of quantity of pleasure is the absence of pain. This is a function of the truism / premise that there are only two feelings - pleasure and pain - which means that in quantity, the measurement that describes the "absence" of the one is the same measurement as the "presence" of the other. But this observation is limited to quantity - it has nothing to do with the quality or the detail of the type of pleasure (or pain) that is being experienced at a particular moment.

Nevertheless, there is at loose in philosophical communities today the idea that Epicurus taught that pleasure is exactly equal - is defined as - "absence of pain," and so many are motivated to try to reconcile the inconsistencies in the texts by holding that Epicurus meant "tranquility" and that "tranquility itself" is the goal of life. What they would really say, if they followed their conclusion to the end, is that "tranquility is the highest pleasure" -- but you rarely see that formulation, as it is so obviously and counter intuitively incorrect.

The record of how all this discussion got started is out there if people would look. [Much of the story begins with Plato and Philebus](#), but Epicurus was not the only one to grapple with the issue. One philosopher -Heronymous of Rhodes - explicitly adopted the modern "absence of pain" position - and everyone at the time knew the difference. Heronymous of Rhodes is forgotten today, but Epicurus is tagged with his incorrect viewpoint. Beware!

The Upside Down World of Considering “Absence of Pain” To Be The Goal Of Life



If You Maintain That “Absence of Pain” Is the
Goal of Life, rather than Pleasure, You’re Not
An Epicurean, You’re A

Hieronymian!

The effort to identify Clement’s principal sources has not encountered much success. One thing worth noting, however, is that like Cicero, his account of the Cyrenaic end appears to go back to Carneades. This emerges from the fact that *Strom.* 2.21.127.1–128.2, which includes two pieces of information about the Cyrenaics (= SSR 4a.198–99), also includes a series of philosophers and ends corresponding to Cicero’s reports of the Carneadean articulation: Epicurus and Aristippus propose the simple end of pleasure, Hieronymus the simple end of absence of pain, Dinomachus and Callipho the complex end of virtue and pleasure, Diodorus the complex end of virtue and absence of pain (compare Cic. *Fin.* 5.20–21, *Tusc.* 5.84–85, *Luc.* 131). Moreover, the end attributed to Callipho

For «we know»¹² that both the Cyrenaics and Epicurus belong to those who make pleasure their starting point, because these say expressly that living pleasantly is the end, and that only pleasure is an endlike good. But

Kurt Lampe, The Birth of Hedonism, p. 201, citing
Cicero and Clement of Alexandria.

Cicero - Academic Questions:

To say nothing, then, of all these opinions, let us now examine those others which have been long and vigorously maintained. Some have accounted pleasure the chief good; the chief of whom was Aristippus, who had been a pupil of Socrates, and from whom the Cyrenaic school spring. After him came Epicurus, whose school is now better known, though he does not exactly agree with the Cyrenaics about pleasure itself. But Callipho thought that pleasure and honour combined made up the chief good. **Hieronymus** placed it in being free from all annoyance; Diodorus in this state when combined with honour. Both these last men were Peripatetics. To live honourably, enjoying those things which nature makes most dear to man, was the definition both of the Old Academy, (as as we may learn from the writings of Polemo, who is highly approved of by Antiochus,) and of Aristotle, and it is the one to which his friends appear now to come nearest. Carneades also introduced a definition, (not because he approved of it himself, but for the sake of opposition to the Stoics,) that the chief good is to enjoy these

Cicero - On Ends:

that for the sake of learning rather than of finding fault with either you or Epicurus. I too, said he, should be more desirous to learn of you, if you can impart anything worth learning, than to find fault with you.

Well, then, said I, you are aware of what Hieronymus¹ of Rhodes says is the chief good, to which he thinks that everything ought to be referred? I know, said he, that he thinks that the great end is freedom from pain. Well, what are his sentiments respecting pleasure? He affirms, he replied, that it is not to be sought for its own sake; for he thinks that rejoicing is one thing, and being free from pain another. And indeed, continued he, he is in this point greatly mistaken, for, as I proved a little while ago, the end of increasing pleasure is the removal of all pain. I will examine, said I, presently, what the meaning of the expression, freedom from pain, is; but unless you are very obstinate, you must admit that pleasure is a perfectly distinct thing from mere freedom from pain. You will, however, said he, find that I am obstinate in this; for nothing can be more real than the identity between the two. Is there, now, said I, any pleasure felt by a thirsty man in drinking? Who can deny it? said he. Is it, asked I, the same pleasure that he feels after his thirst is extinguished? It is, replied he, another kind of pleasure; for the state of extinguished thirst has in it a certain stability of pleasure, but the pleasure of extinguishing it is pleasure in motion. Why, then, said I, do you call things so unlike one another by the same name? Do not

I will give Hieronymus credit for one thing: he is consistent in seeing that holding up "absence of pain" as the goal means to depreciate "pleasure" as the goal of life. Whether they admit it or not, this is the natural road which proponents of "absence of pain" will follow - they end up being opponents of "pleasure" as ordinarily understood.

Next - again from Cicero, On Ends:

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Cicero the lying litigator at work again! Cicero KNOWS that Epicurus did not make the mistake of calling "absence of pain" the goal of life, as Hieronymus did, but because some are so obtuse as to think "absence of pain" makes sense (Hieronymus was such a one!) Cicero is able to use the argument to great effect - or so he thinks! But once we see that the goal is PLEASURE, rather than absence of pain, Cicero's argument falls to the ground:

Post by “Charles” of October 1, 2019 at 2:27 PM

I think those behind every popular academic philosophical book need to see this. My father's philosophy class, briefly mentions Epicurus and what he has learned aside from asking me, is that common misconception of pleasure = no pain, and that katastematic pleasures are better than kinetic. Yet nowhere in any of these circles, do I see an acknowledgement of the juxtaposition of this modern interpretation. *How can pleasure = absence of pain when you are adamant about kinetic v katastematic pleasures with the latter being more important despite it relying on kinetic pleasures to begin with, ie what they believe causes pain?*

Post by “Cassius” of October 1, 2019 at 2:30 PM

Exactly Charles. This information is out there, but I think very few people have taken the time to digest it and think about its implications. And the last couple of decades the problem is accelerating -- all people are reading nowadays is popular wikipedia-like summaries, and the most recent commentaries, and the misinformation is accelerating like a snowball on a hill.

Post by “Cassius” of October 1, 2019 at 6:32 PM

Poster GW: "But is it not a Principal Doctrine that, "Pleasure reaches its maximum limit at the removal of all sources of pain. When such pleasure is present, for as long as it lasts, there is no cause of physical nor mental pain present - nor of both together."?

Poster A:

"...the complete removal of pain has correctly been termed a pleasure.

Even Cicero forwarded Torquatus' writing:

The happiness we pursue does not consist solely of the delightful feelings of physical pleasures.

On the contrary, according to Epicurus, the greatest pleasure is that which is experienced as a result of the complete removal of all pain.

When we are released from pain, the mere sensation of complete emancipation, and relief from distress, is itself a source of great gratification.

But everything that causes gratification is a pleasure, just as everything that causes distress is a pain.

Therefore, the complete removal of pain has correctly been termed a pleasure.

For example, when hunger and thirst are banished by food and drink, the mere fact of getting rid of those distresses brings pleasure as a result.

So as a rule, the removal of pain causes pleasure to take its place.

Post by “Cassius” of October 1, 2019 at 6:33 PM

Poster GW:

Yes indeed that is a principal doctrine, and that has a meaning within the full context of Epicurean philosophy which does not contradict the bottom line that PLEASURE is the goal. That is what this thread is about, Garrett, that it is not possible to take things out of context and still understand the full picture.

And nothing that Poster A just wrote contradicts the point either, Poster G. As A writes, Epicurus endorsed both pleasures that some term as "at rest" and some term as "active" -- but both types are PLEASURE. the key observation is that there are only two feelings - pleasure and pain - and that therefore as a matter of quantity, the "absence of one" is the same as "the presence of the other." This has everything to do with quantity and nothing to do about what type of feeling is actually happening at the time.

Poster G, (and anyone else reading along) - just read Cicero's words closely and you'll see the issue. Cicero was a master of the details of all of these philosophers, and he knew very well that Epicurus' view of the goal of life was pleasure, and that Heironymous' view of the goal was "absence of pain" and that these are two totally different things and are not reconcilable. That means that PD3 does NOT mean that "absence of pain" is the ultimate goal, or even "the ultimate pleasure." The key words are "maximum limit" or as others translate "the limit of quantity." This is not a discussion of the goal of life explicitly, but a discussion of a specific objection to pleasure that had been raised previously by Plato / other philosophers. The objection was that "pleasure has no limit" (we always want more) and Plato thought that was an

effective argument because the logicians had decided that nothing could be an ultimate goal if it can always be made better (meaning that it has no limit). This is set forth in [Philebus](#) and elsewhere.

Epicurus pointed out the error in this reasoning by showing that pleasure DOES have a limit - and that limit is reached when our total experience is filled with pleasures of any time such that there is no more room for the experience of any pain -- all pain has been "crowded out."

And thus in another context Cicero described the Epicureans as holding that "nothing was preferable to a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures." In Defense of Publius Sestius 10.23

Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2019 at 6:33 PM

Poster A:

Even Cicero continues:

Fourth, we do not agree with those who allege that when pleasure is withdrawn, anxiety follows at once.

That result is true only in those situations where the pleasure happens to be replaced directly by a pain.

The truth is, in general, we are glad whenever we lose a pain, even though no active sensation of pleasure comes immediately in its place.

This fact serves to show us how life itself, WHEN LIVED IN THE ABSENCE OF PAIN, IS itself so GREAT a PLEASURE.

Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2019 at 6:34 PM

We will eventually straighten out the posting here, but in the meantime, here is the point: it is absolutely true that all these references to "absence of pain" do exist. The issue is "What do they mean?" and "What do they tell us about the goal of life?" For each reference to "absence of pain" we can find MORE references to "Pleasure," and so it is necessary to determine the relationship between the two. Cicero and Hieronymus and the Greeks knew that the two are absolutely not the same thing. Epicurus had a reason for saying what he said, and it is up to us

to figure out what the Epicureans meant from the fragmentary texts that are still available.

Quoting over and over the same passages does nothing to explain to an honest inquirer how to reconcile these things, and the bitter truth for the Hieronymous crowd is that "absence of anything" tells us NOTHING about "what is present" unless we define the terms of the discussion first. Epicurus had already done that - many times it appears - by making the point that there are only two feelings - pleasure and pain. When there are only two of anything, the "absence of one" means that the space formerly occupied (if any) by that thing is now occupied by its opposite.

If you're like Hieronymous and think that "absence of pain" tells you anything specific and practical about how to spend your life, then more power to you, but have the grace to identify yourself as Hieronymian, and allow the Epicureans to pursue the pleasure which Epicurus, and more importantly Nature, calls us to pursue.

Once we have that ground rules of the debate established, we can then discuss with intelligence what the "absence of pain" references do mean, by referring to Plato and the other anti-pleasure philosophers who suggested that "gods" or "virtue" or "ideal forms" give us the standard by which to live our lives.

Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2019 at 6:34 PM

According to Wikipedia, Hieronymous of Rhodes lived from c. 290 – c. 230 BC, while Epicurus lived from 341–270 BC. That means that Hieronymous lived after Epicurus, and had Epicurus' works to reference, but Epicurus was no longer around to respond to Hieronymous. If indeed Epicurus had taken the position that "absence of pain" is a correct and full statement of the goal of life, why would Hieronymous have had to deviate from Epicurus, and why would Cicero have had to set them up as opposites? the tragedy is that we don't have the works of contemporaneous Epicurus who would certainly have written to clear up this conflict. All we can go on now is that Cicero and those who knew at the time, knew that Hieronymous advocated "absence of pain" and deprecated pleasure, and that that was *not* what Epicurus had taught.

Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2019 at 6:35 PM

More of my ill will toward Cicero: Cicero was nothing if not intelligent, and he had the means at his disposal to get to the bottom of the issue, and, if necessary, consult the two opposing sides

for their own explanation of the apparent conflict between Heironymous and Epicurus. Yet rather than present a sympathetic explanation from an Epicurean (or from a Heironymian) as to why their positions were in conflict, he simply stated the alleged inconsistency and left it unanswered, planting in the mind of his readers that Epicurus was a sloppy thinker and did not even know how to make a coherent argument about pleasure.

Once again the DeWitt statement about Cicero rings in my ears:

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The bottom line is that Cicero took out of context the building-block discussion of "limit of pleasure" - which has a perfectly legitimate place in the *foundation* of the logical structure that Epicurus was erecting - and placed that building-block at the *apex* of the structure instead of in its proper place as a supporting explanation of why Pleasure is the ultimate goal. That's why it ("absence of pain") standing at the apex of the philosophy looks silly or ridiculous or even offensive to neutral normal people, but still is absolutely correct as written when viewed in its proper subordinate context.

Post by "Cassius" of October 1, 2019 at 9:36 PM

[Godfrey](#) just FYI I split off your comments about [Philebus](#) into THIS new subforum / thread: [Philebus - Plato's Arguments Against Pleasure and Epicurean Responses](#)

Post by "Cassius" of October 2, 2019 at 5:17 AM

Poster GFL: "If you maintain that there is pleasure beyond the absence of pain, then you are not an Epicurean, but a Cyrenaic."

Cassius:

In the Epicurean system where all feelings are either pleasure or pain, there would be no possibility of adding another type of feeling once pleasures expand to occupy all feeling. However I am not aware of a Cyreniac statement which would assert such a thing, are you? The word "beyond" in that statement would need explanation, because if we are talking quantity in

the way Epicurus stated it, there is no quantity of pleasure other than "absence of pain." Unless we are more clear about what we are talking about the entire conversation becomes a word game --- which is exactly what it was in its original Platonic context.

What does "quantity of pleasure" mean anyway except in context as an answer to a logic puzzle? That is why it appears to me that this entire discussion must be kept in mind as linked to Plato / [Philebus](#) for us to even understand what we are talking about. The original issue, as queried by Plato in [Philebus](#), started with the question "Does pleasure have a limit?" Are we measuring the pleasure from ice cream in inches or pounds? What is a "limit?"

Unless you in know the reasoning behind the question, the discussion is meaningless -- and worse: deceptive. Of course that is just how Plato intended it, as wordplay to deflate those who see pleasure as the goal of life.

Post by "Cassius" of October 2, 2019 at 5:27 AM

I believe it is also useful to analogize this question to Epicurus' analysis of the boundlessness of space. We can throw the javelin endlessly and never hit the end of space, and yet the universe has a logical limit in being composed of only matter and void, outside of which nothing exists or can be conceived to exist as possibly entering the universe from outside to change it.

Pleasure and pain stand in the role of matter and void - it is useful to consider them from the perspective of quantity for some purposes, but no one should be so foolish as to forget that the matter and space composing my body and my mind are much different to me, and of much more concern, than the matter and space composing a rock on the far side of the moon.

The rock and my mind may be equivalent in quantity (weight) but they are dramatically different in most other, and most important respects, about which "quantity" tells us nothing.

Why are we talking about these absurdities? Only because Plato and the logicians seek to avert us from pleasure by arguing that the greatest good in life must have a "limit."

Post by "Cassius" of October 2, 2019 at 5:51 AM

Jumping ahead when we peel this back far enough we are going to see that this all comes down to feeling vs logic. Life is about feeling / sensation and logic alone is worthless, but Plato

through wordplay is attempting to reverse that natural priority and convince us that logic has primacy. This is why Epicurus' canonical analysis is so important.

But we have come so far down the wrong path for so long that today we have to walk back step by step through the argument in order to see how the Platonic / Stoic / Virtue / Dialectical Logic crowd led us astray.

Post by “Charles” of October 2, 2019 at 10:08 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Life is about feeling / sensation and logic alone is worthless, but Plato through wordplay is attempting to reverse that natural priority and convince us that logic has primacy.

This reminds me of Michel Onfray's quotation about pleasure scaring people.

"Pleasure scares people. They are scared of the word and the actions, reality, and discourses around it. It either scares people or makes them hysterical. There are too many private and personal issues, too many alienating, intimate, painful, wretched, and miserable details. There are secret and hidden deficiencies. There are too many things in the way of just being, living, and enjoying. Hence, people reject the word. They produce spiteful critique that is aggressive and in bad faith or that is simply evasive. Disrespect, discredit, contempt, and disdain are all means for avoiding the subject of pleasure."

It's truly as if most today are frightened by the very word "hedonist" or the concept of living live pleurably, instead believing that hardship is necessary and that in the long run you will be happier (they don't like to acknowledge that this means the after life we don't believe in).

Post by “Cassius” of October 2, 2019 at 10:31 AM

Yes exactly Charles - great quote from Onfray. I think that hits the nail on the head to explain much of what we encounter.

As to Onfray generally, I have not read his material directly, but from what I've observed other people quote he's written a lot of good stuff. I gather that he also chose to differentiate himself from Epicurus and that he's not exactly an Epicurean in his philosophy, but that doesn't mean

that a lot of what he said isn't exactly on point, like (for example) some of Nietzsche.

Post by “Charles” of October 2, 2019 at 11:51 AM

He's more of a modern revival of a hedonist/humanist. Devotedly atheist and bashes Christianity alongside Islam, and even wrote a book about philosophers and their diets. Yet he is almost the definition of academia and many find him hard to access, also because of the short supply of extensive English translations of his works (at least from what I've noticed).

Post by “Titus” of February 27, 2021 at 7:12 PM

I would like to add my personal view, which I see somehow between the two oppositions. I suggest a very important cause of the dispute is a different way of access to Epicurean philosophy.

The very common approach of reading the letter to Menoecus is very clear in its essence. The letter argues, that we should prefer a life focusing on a peaceful state of living. It is argued, through making us independent from goods we do not need, wrong beliefs, fears etc. we achieve the best life imaginable and become generally independent from the difficulties of the world. The main problem is, that this approach doesn't refer to Epicureanism as a wider system of knowledge. Many thinkers only refer to the ethics as presented in letter to Menoecus (additionally Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings) but do not apply Canonics and Physics, which they consider as a different point of interest.

For a person who studies all three main branches of Epicurean philosophy and even tries to combine and interconnect, it's something different. Understanding Epicureanism as a holistic system reveals that pleasure occurs in the beginning. It's a central part of Epicurus' epistemology. It is so important, because it occurs naturally. Searching for pleasure is not an abstract idea, it's an aim that is intrinsic to every living being.

In my opinion, Epicurus understood rightfull, that pleasure is natural and central for every living being. We are not able to choose, we have to handle with our attraction to moments, which we perceive as more delightful than others.

In the Epicurean world, nature sets the standards. Epicurus reflects pleasure and comes to the conclusion, that it has to do with the conditions of our being. This is why he distinguishes

between natural and not natural, necessary and not necessary. In other words: There is this basic impulse called pleasure and Epicurus examines this term in relation to the fundamentals of being alive.

In conclusion, we get an approach to the term pleasure which stretches from the Canonics to the Ethics by corresponding to the Physics.

In my personal opinion, Epicurus is neither looking for painlessness nor for pleasure as pleasure on its own. He tries to find out what a human is in itself. This is why he focuses on senses, feelings and anticipations. In relationship to a theory about the functioning of the world (physics) Epicurus derives his conclusions about how to conduct.

Consequently, satisfying all natural and necessary desires is the highest level of being. But being a sensitive being also means, that there are differences in how this natural desires can be fulfilled and perceived. This is the flavour, which can tend to be not necessary (as Diogenes Laertios explains). This is why Epicurus advises only to fulfill natural but not necessary desires if they do not harm.

Finally, my personal view puts 'painlessness' in the centre, but it never occurs as that abstract idea as the word tends to appear. Ataraxia and aponia are related to the world made of atoms, which means that they will never exist perfect or erase the relationship with the world itself. We perceive painlessness only as a pleasurable state because it means, that we acquire everything what our natural fundamentals are looking for. This position is an important part of Epicurus' way to absolute freedom, but it remains only, if we remain near to the given fundamentals, as set by nature.

As Lucretius tells to us at the beginning of book two of De Rerum Natura:

Display Spoiler

'Tis sweet, when, down the mighty main, the winds

Roll up its waste of waters, from the land

To watch another's labouring anguish far,

Not that we joyously delight that man

Should thus be smitten, but because 'tis sweet

To mark what evils we ourselves be spared;

'Tis sweet, again, to view the mighty strife

Of armies embattled yonder o'er the plains,

Ourselves no sharers in the peril; but naught
There is more goodly than to hold the high
Serene plateaus, well fortified by the wise,
Whence thou may'st look below on other men
And see them ev'rywhere wand'ring, all dispersed
In their lone seeking for the road of life;
Rivals in genius, or emulous in rank,
Pressing through days and nights with hugest toil
For summits of power and mastery of the world.
O wretched minds of men! O blinded hearts!
In how great perils, in what darks of life
Are spent the human years, however brief!-
O not to see that nature for herself
Barks after nothing, save that pain keep off,
Disjoined from the body, and that mind enjoy
Delightful feeling, far from care and fear!
Therefore we see that our corporeal life
Needs little, altogether, and only such
As takes the pain away, and can besides
Strew underneath some number of delights.
More grateful 'tis at times (for nature craves
No artifice nor luxury), if forsooth
There be no golden images of boys
Along the halls, with right hands holding out

The lamps ablaze, the lights for evening feasts,
And if the house doth glitter not with gold
Nor gleam with silver, and to the lyre resound
No fretted and gilded ceilings overhead,
Yet still to lounge with friends in the soft grass
Beside a river of water, underneath
A big tree's boughs, and merrily to refresh
Our frames, with no vast outlay- most of all
If the weather is laughing and the times of the year
Besprinkle the green of the grass around with flowers.
Nor yet the quicker will hot fevers go,
If on a pictured tapestry thou toss,
Or purple robe, than if 'tis thine to lie
Upon the poor man's bedding. Wherefore, since
Treasure, nor rank, nor glory of a reign
Avail us naught for this our body, thus
Reckon them likewise nothing for the mind:
Save then perchance, when thou beholdest forth
Thy legions swarming round the Field of Mars,
Rousing a mimic warfare- either side
Strengthened with large auxiliaries and horse,
Alike equipped with arms, alike inspired;
Or save when also thou beholdest forth
Thy fleets to swarm, deploying down the sea:

For then, by such bright circumstance abashed,
Religion pales and flees thy mind; O then
The fears of death leave heart so free of care.
But if we note how all this pomp at last
Is but a drollery and a mocking sport,
And of a truth man's dread, with cares at heels,
Dreads not these sounds of arms, these savage swords
But among kings and lords of all the world
Mingles undaunted, nor is overawed
By gleam of gold nor by the splendour bright
Of purple robe, canst thou then doubt that this
Is aught, but power of thinking?- when, besides
The whole of life but labours in the dark.
For just as children tremble and fear all
In the viewless dark, so even we at times
Dread in the light so many things that be
No whit more fearsome than what children feign,
Shuddering, will be upon them in the dark.
This terror then, this darkness of the mind,
Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,
Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,
But only nature's aspect and her law.

Lucretius. De Rerum Natura. William Ellery Leonard. E. P. Dutton. 1916.

Post by “Cassius” of February 28, 2021 at 6:58 AM

Thanks for the detailed post Titus. Here are my thoughts:

[Quote from Titus](#)

Many thinkers only refer to the ethics as presented in letter to Menoeceus (additionally [Principal Doctrines](#), Vatican Sayings) but do not apply Canonics and Physics, which they consider as a different point of interest. For a person who studies all three main branches of Epicurean philosophy and even tries to combine and interconnect, it's something different.

I very much agree with that. It seems to me that most of the people whose interpretations I find reason to criticize focus almost exclusively on one aspect (most frequently, the letter to Meoneceus) and act as if the epistemology and physics are irrelevant. In a nearby (in time) thread I think we see an example of that in an American philosopher (Pierce) who embraces one aspect of Epicurus to support his own views, but rejects the rest of Epicurus. I think it's necessary to incorporate them all to get a balanced picture.

[Quote from Titus](#)

In my personal opinion, Epicurus is neither looking for painlessness nor for pleasure as pleasure on its own. He tries to find out what a human is in itself. This is why he focuses on senses, feelings and anticipations.

I agree that Epicurus is very concerned about looking to Nature to determine what a human is in itself, and that he does not just start with pleasure as the goal without any reason. But I would have to differ and say that the reliable texts when read as a whole (including the material cited in this thread) are clear that Epicurus held "pleasure" to be the goal and not painlessness. When you say he focuses on senses / feelings / anticipations I think that is where the answer is found, in that it seems to me that he is using "feelings" (or whatever word one prefers in translation) in general as the basis for choice, with pleasure being the positive thing to choose and pain being the negative to avoid, which is both a theoretical statement of the goal (pleasure) and a practical way of evaluating each decision (does it lead to greater pleasure or greater pain). I think the multiple perspective (incorporating both theory and practice) is how it is kept in mind that even when you are sometimes choosing pain in the short term, you are really always choosing pleasure (because you view the long term / total result),

[Quote from Titus](#)

Consequently, satisfying all natural and necessary desires is the highest level of being.

This is a phrasing that I find very troublesome whenever I run into it, but it is definitely a conclusion a lot of people reach. For me, there is no way to carry such a formulation to its

logical conclusion without accepting that living in a cave on bread and water is the course most to be desired for everyone. Epicurus himself certainly did not do that, and that observation alone is sufficient (to me) to show that such an interpretation would not be valid. I am sure that an elaborate and detailed rendering of such a phrase, by going through each word and applying very specific definitions, could be employed to save the formula from that result, but I just don't think Epicurus intended for his students to take that path.

[Quote from Titus](#)

This is why Epicurus advises only to fulfill natural but not necessary desires if they do not harm.

I would repeat the same observation as I just made. There are literally (to my knowledge) zero examples of actual Epicureans who pursued lives of asceticism and minimalism. Again, I realize that the formulation can probably be explained in a way that allowed the activism of a Cassius Longinus or the movement in the highest circles of Roman life of Atticus and other leading Romans who embraced Epicurus, but they had access to far more authoritative texts and teachers than we do, and they apparently found no contradiction in their lifestyles and fundamental Epicurean teaching. Maybe in fact there was a large body of ancient Epicureans who competed with the Stoics and the various ascetics in pursuing only that which was necessary to sustain their lives, but if there were such applications that seem to have escaped mention in the texts I have seen.

Much more likely to me is the deduction from such references as are made in the Ciceronian comments set out here that Epicurus would have been fully aware of the option of setting up painlessness as the real goal, as set forth by Hieronymus, and that Epicurus rejected that option in favor of identifying the goal as "pleasure" - which he then proceeded to broadly define as including all types of physical and mental pleasures.

As in the concluding sections of Diogenes of Laertius:

Quote

Epicurus differs from the Cyrenaics about pleasure. For they do not admit static pleasure, but only that which consists in motion. But Epicurus admits both kinds both in the soul and in the body, as he says in the work on Choice and Avoidance and in the book on The Ends of Life and in the first book On Lives and in the letter to his friends in Mytilene. Similarly, Diogenes in the 17th book of Miscellanies and Metrodorus in the Timocrates speak thus: 'Pleasure can be thought of both as consisting in motion and as static.' And Epicurus in the work on Choice speaks as follows: 'Freedom from trouble in the mind and from pain in the body are static pleasures, but Joy and exultation are considered as active pleasures involving motion. '

A further difference from the Cyrenaics: they thought that bodily pains were worse than those of the soul, and pointed out that offenses are visited by bodily punishment. But Epicurus held that the pains of the soul are worse, for the flesh is only troubled for the moment, but the soul for past, present, and future. In the same way the pleasures of the soul are greater. As proof that pleasure is the end, he points out that all living creatures as soon as they are born take delight in pleasure, but resist pain by a natural impulse apart from reason. Therefore we avoid pain by instinct, just as Heracles, when he is being devoured by the shirt of Nessus, cries aloud,

Or maybe I could summarize my views on all of this subject as **"Like Epicurus, I refuse to give up joy and exultation!"**

Post by "Titus" of March 2, 2021 at 12:06 PM

Thanks a lot for your answer Cassius. Good points to go more deeper in detail.

Quote from Titus

Consequently, satisfying all natural and necessary desires is the highest level of being.

Quote from Cassius

This is a phrasing that I find very troublesome whenever I run into it, but it is definitely a conclusion a lot of people reach.

I think I was too short in my writing or too imprecise. I would rather understand centering on natural and necessary desires as the fundament of the pleasurable life, but not necessarily the house built on it. This fundament enables a man to stand very close to the standards set by nature.

Quote

But Epicurus admits both kinds both in the soul and in the body, as he says in the work on Choice and Avoidance and in the book on The Ends of Life and in the first book On

Lives and in the letter to his friends in Mytilene.

Taking this quote for granted, I emphasize on the importance of examining someones needs as an important point of how to achieve pleasure 'in the soul'. Personally, what I once called once 'flavour' before, I would identificate with pleasure 'in the body'.

Perhaps we are just battleing with words. My position is, that our choice and avoidance should be closely related to the natural and necessary desires as a tree is always related to the soil he grows on. All flavour is related to this soil. For example, drinking, eating, friendship, see the sun shining and feeling the sunbeams on your skin is active persception or something in motion or how you would call it. They are all part of an Epicurean conception of life. But it is very important, that we do not loose our connection with the soil and do not begin to relate to abstract ideas. Seeking for pleasures in abstract ideas as feeling powerful related to others or being abundant in money can destroy your the pleasurable life.

Talking about my personal experience, applying Epicurean philosophy, especially the subsystem of choice and avoidance of needs, gives me great security which feels very pleasurable for myself. In addition with a bright, sunny day, interacting with friends, having a good meal, having great impressions... yeah, it's something different than 'painlessness'. We should actually avoid this term 😊

Post by “Cassius” of March 2, 2021 at 12:15 PM

What we're discussing is a very interesting and continuing issue of how to express things. It certainly is clear that the "natural / necessary" analysis is in the texts and must be important, yet no matter how much someone talks about it, I've never really met anyone who actually follows that path to its logical extreme if taken literally. So I agree that when we're talking among friends we're really talking about wording issues as much as anything else.

Post by “Titus” of March 3, 2021 at 5:42 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I've never really met anyone who actually follows that path to its logical extreme if taken literally

I am rather surprised to read that commentary, because in my understanding this is a key part of Epicurean philosophy. Interesting how foci tend to be different.

I really understand your critique on focussing on desires and needs, because there are similarities to within many or most religions/philosophies. Usually, they try to minimize their needs and dim them. Consequently, their own point of interesting seems to be more enlightened. Interestingly, many of those participants (e.g. monks) in those strategies will tell you, that they feel no lack of anykind or even better than before changing their lives. Ironically, some will report they feel more delightfull, more pleasurable.

How can this function when, as we think, these philosophies seem to be false?

I believe, every religion/philosophy that really produces pleasure to some degree, follows to an uncertain degree unconsciously the path of nature, as taught by Epicurus.

I think there is an error in holding Epicurus' (key) techniques for the same as the techniques/aims of the competitors in the philosophy market. They look very similar, but they may play a totally different role.

'Painlessness' (a term I first read in this forum and adapted 😊) is by my own words rather focussing on the important things in life and being open for the bright impressions of life without being disturbed about unimportant things. This is what Epicurus' differentiation between natural/unnatural/necessary might be about.

Post by "Cassius" of March 3, 2021 at 8:54 PM

[Quote from Titus](#)

because in my understanding this is a key part of Epicurean philosophy.

I don't doubt that that is your understanding at all, as that is the prevailing view in the academic world at large. That's why we're very clear in our terms of service and our welcome post and in the "Not Neo Epicurean Graphic" and the "Our Posting Policy" graphic that that is not the prevailing view here, and at some point we limit the continued argument for that position.

Now of course in saying all that I'm not intending to say that you have approached the line or in danger of that in any way, but just to acknowledge the truth that the academic world is hugely hostile to the view of Epicurus taken by Norman Dewitt and the writers listed in the "Don't be a Stoic in Disguise" Post in the right sidebar on the front page.

Basically the main reason this forum was founded and has sustained itself to date is in opposition to that view and to provide a place for those who think differently to compare notes and arguments against that viewpoint.

Note: I realize in this post and in what I am quoting from yours there is a danger in losing the focus on what "this" is. To summarize once again, possibly the best way of stating what I am arguing for is a "common sense" definition of the word pleasure, as ordinary people understand that word, which includes BOTH pleasures of "rest" and also "joy and delight" from the point of view that "all pleasures are desirable" and the only reason that one might choose not to pursue certain pleasures is that in the context of that person the pursuit would bring more pain than pleasure. This is the opposite of the "minimalism for the sake of minimalism" approach or any approach that embraces asceticism as the true end, rather than pleasure. But of course that's just a brief summary of the viewpoint you can find (hopefully!) permeating the great majority of posts on this forum.

Post by "Titus" of March 5, 2021 at 10:44 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the only reason that one might choose not to pursue certain pleasures is that in the context of that person the pursuit would bring more pain than pleasure. This is the opposite of the "minimalism for the sake of minimalism" approach or any approach that embraces asceticism as the true end, rather than pleasure.

I fully agree with your statement. I personally consider the necessary/unnecessary/natural/unnatural model as an approach of Epicurus to elaborate how such a differentiation could work and in my experience it works out very well. I also recognize that there might be a difference in how important some pieces of the Epicurean puzzle are for some persons - or not. The corner pieces are definitely sensations, feeling, anticipations and nothing else.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Basically the main reason this forum was founded and has sustained itself to date is in opposition to that view and to provide a place for those who think differently to compare notes and arguments against that viewpoint.

Hence you will be happy to hear that this is a main reason for myself for participating (mostly reading) on this forum. The consistent approach of Prof. DeWitt seems to catch and unite the central points of Epicurean philosophy, although I've missed so far reading him in his original words. Additionally, in the last years my interests have tended rather to an understanding of the universe as a whole as presented e.g. by Lucretius.

Post by "Cassius" of March 5, 2021 at 11:24 AM

Thank you for your positive response to my last post 😊 If I recall correctly I woke up in the middle of the night and wrote that and I knew at the time I needed to be concerned about sounding too harsh 😊 It's a big world and I like every point of view to have a place in the sun --- unfortunately I find that not everyone shares that view. Maybe this forum is a version of "isonomia" -- not really striving for an equal number of people who focus on the "joy and delight" approach vs those who focus on "minimizing pain" --- but at least this forum is a step toward an "equitable distribution" so that there is a place for those in the J&D camp to have a place where their viewpoints prevail.

knowledge of their abode. He so interpreted the significance of infinity as to extend it from matter and space to the sphere of values, that is, to perfection and imperfection. In brief, if the universe were thought to be imperfect throughout its infinite extent, it could no longer be called infinite. This necessity of thought impelled him to promulgate a subsidiary principle, which he called *isonomia*, a sort of cosmic justice, according to which the imperfection in particular parts of the universe is offset by the perfection of the whole. Cicero rendered it *aequabilis tributio*, "equitable apportionment."⁷⁰ The mistake of rendering it as "equilibrium" must be avoided.

The term *isonomia* itself, which may be anglicized as isonomy, deserves a note. That it is lacking in extant Epicurean texts, all of them elementary, and is transmitted only by Cicero is evidence of its belonging to higher doctrine and advanced studies. Epicurus switched its meaning slightly, as he did that of the word *prolepsis*. To the Greeks it signified equality of all before the law, a boast of Athenians in par-

271

EPICURUS AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

ticular. It was a mate to *eunomia*, government by law, as opposed to barbaric despotism, a boast of Greeks in general. That Epicurus thought to make capital of this happy connotation may be considered certain. He was vindicating for Nature a sort of justice, the bad being overbalanced by the good. It is also possible that he was remotely influenced by the teachings of Zoroaster, well known in his day through the conquests of Alexander, according to whom good and evil, as represented by Ormazd and Ahriman, battled for the upper hand in mundane affairs.

Post by "Cassius" of June 23, 2022 at 11:04 AM

It's been three years since I started this thread, and we have a good number of new people who may not have seen it - and I think it is worth keeping in mind the name "[Hieronymus of Rhodes](#)" who is relatively obscure but useful as a contrast against Epicurus's views

I won't try to repeat all that was posted earlier in the thread, but it's worth keeping this name in

What is it, then, that you ask? I will tell you, said I, and that for the sake of learning rather than of finding fault with either you or Epicurus. I too, said he, should be more desirous to learn of you, if you can impart anything worth learning, than to find fault with you.

Well, then, said I, you are aware of what [Hieronymus](#)¹ of Rhodes says is the chief good, to which he thinks that everything ought to be referred? I know, said he, that he thinks that the great end is freedom from pain. Well, what are his sentiments respecting pleasure? He affirms, he replied, that it is not to be sought for its own sake; for he thinks that rejoicing is one thing, and being free from pain another. And indeed, continued he, he is in this point greatly mistaken, for, as I proved a little while ago, the end of increasing pleasure is the removal of all pain. I will examine, said I, presently, what the meaning of the expression, freedom from pain, is; but unless you are very obstinate, you must admit that pleasure is a perfectly distinct thing from mere freedom from pain. You will, however, said he, find that I am obstinate in this; for nothing can be more real than the identity between the two. Is there, now, said I, any pleasure felt by a thirsty man in drinking? Who can deny it? said he. Is it, asked I, the same pleasure that he feels after his thirst is extinguished? It is, replied he, another kind of pleasure; for the state of extinguished thirst has in it a certain stability of pleasure, but the pleasure of extinguishing it is pleasure in motion. Why, then, said I, do you call things so unlike one another by the same name? Do not

itly promoted "absence of pleasure was not the highest S.

Cicero - Academic Questions:

To say nothing, then, of all these opinions, let us now examine those others which have been long and vigorously maintained. Some have accounted pleasure the chief good; the chief of whom was Aristippus, who had been a pupil of Socrates, and from whom the Cyrenaic school spring. After him came Epicurus, whose school is now better known, though he does not exactly agree with the Cyrenaics about pleasure itself. But Callipho thought that pleasure and honour combined made up the chief good. Hieronymus placed it in being free from all annoyance; Diodorus in this state when combined with honour. Both these last men were Peripatetics. To live honourably, enjoying those things which nature makes most dear to man, was the definition both of the Old Academy, (as as we may learn from the writings of Polemo, who is highly approved of by Antiochus,) and of Aristotle, and it is the one to which his friends appear now to come nearest. Carneades also introduced a definition, (not because he approved of it himself, but for the sake of opposition to the Stoics,) that the chief good is to enjoy these

Post by “beasain” of June 30, 2022 at 5:37 AM

BTW *De finibus bonorum et malorum* of Cicero can be read online [here](#). It is transcribed, as I understand by Bill Thayer from the Loeb Edition 1931. It is according to him since 1959 public domain. Enjoy!

Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2022 at 5:44 AM

That LacusCurtius site is great - thank you!