

How Much Pleasure Is Needed For A Happy Life?

Post by "Cassius" of November 11, 2019 at 9:13 AM

Post by [Elayne](#) , answering this question:

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This morning we have had a question about "how much pleasure is ideal for a happy life"-- instead of posting the question as is, I am posting it along with the answer for the ease of casual readers who may not go through the comments.

The good news is that Epicurus certainly did address this, but to answer it we need to look at the wording of the question itself, because there are false assumptions built in. Once those false assumptions are removed, I think you will all know the answer Epicurus gave, even before you see it-- because it is the only possible answer!

I am writing it in my own words, because these are things I have found to be true about my own life. In the comments I will link to a document that has his writing cited.

First, the word "ideal" is a key that Platonism has become a habit, possibly unconscious. There is no such thing. Ideals, ideal outcomes, ideal conditions-- these are all imaginary concepts. The universe is material, and there are no absolute standards/ways to measure or select for what would be considered the best, the good, the perfect, the ideal. So you never have to answer any question for yourself that contains ideals. Those questions lead you on wild goose chases, away from your pleasure.

Our guide for life is the same one all living creatures have-- choosing pleasure instead of pain. Humans will have many pleasures in common but some individual differences. So let's reword the question-- "how much pleasure will I find pleasurable, for a happy life?"

Now let's address "happy"-- since there are no external/ideal standards, that word also has no meaning outside of pleasure. Most ordinary people mean pleasure when they say happy, joyful, etc.

Now the question is "how much pleasure will I find pleasurable, for a pleasurable life?" And the answer is obvious now-- as much as possible! Because if there is a quantity of pleasure that isn't pleasurable-- it's not pleasure! That wouldn't make sense. Whatever is not pleasurable is pain.

All pleasures are "good" in themselves because we have no other standard to rate them by. But if a specific _activity_ causes us more pain than pleasure, we will have more pleasure if we choose a different action instead. And sometimes you will see that some pain stands between you and greater pleasure, so you will decide to go through the pain for your reward.

It really is that simple.

For every action, consider the full effect of what will happen in terms of pleasure and pain, and keep choosing for pleasure. Do not make up reasons to limit your pleasures-- there are none. If you have chosen so much pleasure that all pain is pushed out, that is the limit of the pleasure you can possibly feel at any given moment-- you won't want more, because you will be entirely blissfully pleasure-filled. In normal life pain will happen, but if you keep persistently choosing wisely, you can indeed have a very pleasurable (happy) life! This is our hope for you. ♥

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One more thing I would add in addition to this is that it is useful, when thinking about quantity, to think about the analogy of a filling a vessel, as stated in the opening of Lucretius book 6 in the quote below. The point being made is that it is desirable to fill the vessel with pleasure, but in order to do so you must plug the holes that prevent it (the vessel / your mind / your life) from being filled to the top with pleasure. Primary among those holes in Epicurean doctrine are fear of the gods, fear of death, fear of pain, and confusion caused by the allegation that something besides pleasure has value in itself. An important corollary to all this is that once you have filled the vessel to the top, then adding more pleasure simply causes the vessel to overflow, which means it cannot be handled/experienced and therefore does not produce a situation that is any better than the vessel sitting calmly while filled to the brim with pleasures:

"For when he [Epicurus] saw how little would suffice for necessary use, and by what small provisions life might be preserved; that Nature had prepared every thing ready to support mankind; that men abounded with wealth, and were loaded with honor and applause, and happy in their private concerns, in the good character of their children, and yet their minds were restless at home, complaining and lamenting the misery of their condition; ***he perceived the vessel itself (the mind) was the cause of the calamity, and by the corruption of that, every thing, though ever so good, that was poured into it was tainted: it was full of holes, and run out, and so could never by any means be filled; and whatever it received within, it infected with a stinking smell.***"

<https://archive.org/stream/tlucret...e/n577/mode/2up>