

# Continuous Pleasure / Sustained Pleasure

Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2020 at 4:33 PM

I was working today and needing to find the references to "continuous" pleasure and had a hard time finding them. Here are a couple:

USENER 116

**Plutarch, *Against Colotes*, 17, p. 1117A:** Such is ... the man who, in in the letter to Anaxarchus can pen such words as these: “But I, for my part, summon you to sustained pleasures and not to empty virtues, which fill us with vain expectations that destroy peace of mind.”

CICERO's ON ENDS

XII. The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

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Post by “Godfrey” of September 7, 2020 at 5:20 PM

There are these:

PD3 The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. When pleasure is present, so long as it is **uninterrupted**, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together.

PD4 **Continuous pain** does not last long in the flesh; on the contrary, pain, if extreme, is present a very short time, and even that degree of pain which barely outweighs pleasure in the flesh does not last for many days together. Illnesses of long duration even permit of an excess of pleasure over pain in the flesh. (well it's not pleasure but it's continuous, fwiw)

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## Post by "Charles" of September 7, 2020 at 6:11 PM

USENER 146

(Same page from 116)

**Plutarch, *Against Colotes*, 17, p. 1117A:** But what epithet do they deserve - with your "roars" of ecstasy and "cries of thanksgiving" and tumultuous "bursts of applause" and "reverential demonstrations," and the whole apparatus of adoration that you people resort to in supplicating and hymning the man who summons you to sustained and frequent pleasures?

USENER 431

**Plutarch, *That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible*, 5, p. 1089D:** Now first observe their conduct here, how they keep decanting this "pleasure" or "painlessness" or "stable condition" of theirs back and forth, from body to mind and then once more from mind to body, compelled, since pleasure is not retained in the mind but leaks and slips away, to attach it to its source, shoring up "the pleasure of the body with the delight of the soul," as Epicurus puts it, but in the end passing once more by anticipation from the delight to the pleasure

USENER 439

**Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, V.34.95:** The whole teaching of [Epicurus] about pleasure is that pleasure is, he thinks, always to be wished and sought for in and for itself because it is pleasure, and that on the same principle pain is always to be avoided for the simple reason that it is pain, and so the wise man will employ a system of counter-balancing which enables him both to avoid pleasure, should it be likely to ensure greater pain, and submit to pain where it ensures greater pleasure; and all pleasurable things, although judged of by the bodily senses, are notwithstanding transmitted on again to the soul; and for this reason while the body feels delight for the time that it has the sensation of present pleasure, it is the soul which has both the realization of present pleasure conjointly with the body and anticipates coming pleasure, and does not suffer past pleasure to slip away: thus the wise man will always have a perpetual continuation of pleasures, as the expectation of pleasures hoped for is combined with the recollection of pleasures already realized.

**Cf. Zeno the Epicurean (Zeno of Sidon), by way of Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, III.17.38:** "Blessed is he who has the enjoyment of present pleasure and the assurance that he would have enjoyment either throughout life or for a great part of life without the intervention of pain, or should pain come, that it would be short-lived if extreme, but if prolonged it would still allow more that was pleasant than evil."

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Something I've always maintained when discussing continuous and anticipated pleasure, is that an example of its practice it can be seen from Epicurus himself in his letter to Idomeneus, on his last day on Earth.

*"On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could increase them; but I set above them all the gladness of mind at the memory of our past conversations. But I would have you, as becomes your lifelong attitude to me and to philosophy, watch over the children of Metrodorus."*

Which I sometimes contrast with Usener 21 from Plutarch (That Epicurus makes... 1094E)

*"Now it has not escaped Epicurus that bodily pleasures, like the Etesian winds, after reaching their full force, slacken and fail; thus he raises the **Problem** whether the Sage when old and impotent still delights in touching and fingering the fair. In this he is not of the same mind as Sophocles, who was as glad to have got beyond reach of this pleasure as of a savage and furious master."*

While in most circumstances, pleasure arises from a movement, motion, or will to satiate a given desire. It can later be recollected with fondness in a very static manner. But we know that not all pleasures stem from desire itself, as we can think of the replenishment theory, where the passing scent of bouquet of roses is pleasant to the sense which did not require any prior desire. Further, in that freedom from any stress or pain, something generally (and all too often) regarded as a pleasure reserved for the mind or soul which is elevated from the body.

However, it would not be like an Epicurean to abandon the pleasures of the body or those involving motion to achieve, in favor of the calm and sober pleasures of the mind. As Cicero puts it well in his *Tusculan Disputations* (U439), we do well to employ a balance between our choices and selections of pleasure, to that end we select our pleasures to the fullest extent while avoiding pain or minimizing how often we endure it by means of the canon. It's only natural that we expect ourselves to both fully enjoy pleasure in the present, and ensure that our pleasures persist into the future, so that when it comes we may continue to enjoy the present as we always have.

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## Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2020 at 6:21 PM

Thank you guys for those additional cites!

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## Post by “Don” of September 7, 2020 at 6:48 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

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User 116 from [Cassius](#) , User 146 from [Charles](#) , and PD 4 both use the word [συνεχώς](#) or [a variation](#). The problem is it has a wide range of meanings! Continuous, continually, without interruption, at frequent intervals, etc.

PD3 doesn't actually have a word meaning continuous! Here's my clunky literal translation of PD3:

"The limit of the degree of pleasure (is) the whole of the removal of that which causes pain. Where that which gives pleasure exists, during the time it is present, there is not bodily pain nor that which disturbs the mind nor either of these together."

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## Post by “Don” of September 7, 2020 at 9:55 PM

Thanks, [Charles](#), for noting:

Quote

*"On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could increase them;*

I find it interesting that the word συνεχώς doesn't occur in this excerpt from the Letter to Idomeneus but rather a word that means that the pain "didn't leave" so I think a better translation here would have been "unrelenting" since I've seen that word used with pain in English. True, "unrelenting" is "continual" pain (or is it "continuous") but shades of meaning matter.

I realize I may get annoying going on about this, but this continues to be over of my problems with translations. There are faux connections that can be made by noting English words when the original text doesn't necessarily reflect this.

I'm not in any way saying anything negative about [Charles](#) noting this! I don't want to be misunderstood here! I think this was a good catch on his part and a valuable excerpt to investigate! It's valuable to compare and contrast translations and see where they lead!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2020 at 3:11 AM**

In the example of the last day comment it does strike me that the shade of meaning is pretty close, but it definitely helps to point out the use of different words. We tend to put a lot of weight on small subtleties and we really need to be careful about that. Especially in Lucretius it seems like they often stated things in multiple ways for clarity, so that could be another factor in the use of different words too.