

# Journal of happiness studies article on Epicurus

Post by “brett” of November 26, 2020 at 7:04 PM

Hi all

Interesting article that unfortunately furthers the absence of pain fallacy. Would love evrryone’s thoughts:

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10...-006-9036-z.pdf>

Be well

Brett

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Post by “Godfrey” of November 27, 2020 at 1:25 AM

I've only read up through section 5.4, but find it quite interesting in that the authors interpret the goal of EP as absence of pain and then show (beginning in 5.4) that modern research invalidates absence of pain as a valid goal. Apparently modern research has validated many of the positions that we tend to take here.

Quote

Pain relief and the escape from expected pain leads to positive affect (e.g. Frijda, 1988; Lazarus, 1991), but continuous absence of pain does not necessarily lead to happy tranquillity, but can also be boring. Headey and Wearing (1992) describe the fact that a significant minority of people have low levels of psychological distress and are unhappy at the same time. Csikszentmihaly (1999) states that happiness results from optimal functioning that can be found between boredom and anxiety. These findings contradict Epicurus’ notion of happiness as mere absence of pain. Epicurus’ happiness advice does not cater for exhilarating aspects of a business man’s life that involves risks and losses but also makes one live to the full and be happy on balance. He also did not think of anhedonia, the inability to experience emotion, that is characteristic of people with a depressive disorder. This condition is often more difficult to bear than emotional pain itself. Happiness is definitely something other than the mere absence of all pain (Bergsma, 1995).

Headey and Wearing (1992, pp. 4–8) also notice that some people are happy despite the fact that they experience high levels of psychological distress. People often perceive life as both quite satisfying and quite stressful. This goes against Epicurus' idea that happiness can be equated with absence of pain. Still, the combination of high distress with happiness can be reconciled with Epicurus' philosophy, because of his idea that we can learn to tolerate pain.

The independence of positive and negative affect has two consequences for Epicurus' position. His notion that avoiding pain is sufficient for establishing a good quality of life may be too conservative. The second consequence is that he neglected the role of positive affect. We start with a discussion of his ideas to avoid pain.

So while I'm not convinced by the authors' interpretation of EP, I'm looking forward to continuing to read how they invalidate the absence of pain interpretation.

Thanks for posting this, Brett!

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### **Post by “brett” of November 27, 2020 at 6:55 AM**

YES!! I didn't want to give that away but that's exactly what struck me second to their interpretation of EP.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of November 27, 2020 at 6:57 AM**

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

Apparently modern research has validated many of the positions that we tend to take here.

I agree that it does validate Epicurus, but I think the starting point for the analysis is to be sure to get a grip on what "absence of pain" is supposed to mean. Unless you start with Epicurus' premise that all reactions are either pleasure or pain, the term "absence of pain" or "absence of" anything is not going to give a coherent statement of what is present to even begin to talk about, so most discussions of "absence of pain" are going to be meaningless without further starting-point definitions.

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## Post by "Cassius" of November 27, 2020 at 7:06 AM

I'm going to have to come back later to read the full article but on just the opening I would certainly dispute the part in red:

how to achieve personal happiness. Moreover, he claimed to have founded his philosophy on empirical facts. His philosophy about the good life brought Epicurus fame that has lasted till the present day. Epicureanism is a name for a specific lifestyle that seeks refined sensual pleasure, although this stance does not follow logically from the philosophy. Epicurus warned explicitly against the pursuit of luxury. Indulgence would increase desires and make a person dependent on the whims of fortune.

Good grief, there's a reason that Epicurus said the goal is "pleasure" and didn't fill the definition of the goal with all sorts of other qualifiers like "refined" and "sensual."

Further, though I see that there is preliminary discussion of it, I think we always have to remind ourselves that "pleasure" is what we all understand without need of explanation due to the faculty of pleasure. The word "happiness" however is a conceptual expression with all the limitations of any conceptual expression. There is no faculty of "happiness" - the faculty is of pleasure.

So as Torquatus said, a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure:

### Quote

If then even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on pleasure, whereas pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.

Probably best in this context to remember Diogenes of Oinoanda too, in so that we identify happiness with the best mode of life:

### Quote

Fr. 32

... [the latter] being as malicious as the former.

I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now.

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with

them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

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### **Post by “Elayne” of November 27, 2020 at 11:41 AM**

[Godfrey](#) when I read people saying that absence of pain is boring, I am completely confused. That makes no sense whatsoever-- boredom is one of the pains, so that is like saying absence of pain is pain, or  $0=1$ . It's nonsensical. It makes me wonder if they have even read their own writing or thought about it. Where was their editor, lol?

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### **Post by “Don” of November 27, 2020 at 1:09 PM**

This absence of pain becomes nonsensical too when you take it a translation and replace pleasure with absence of pain, ex:

PD 3. The magnitude of *absence of pain* is limited by the removal of all pain. Wherever there is *absence of pain*, so long as it is present, there is no pain either of body or of mind or both. (Hicks)

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of November 27, 2020 at 1:58 PM**

I'm not sure if I was clear in my post as I was in a turkey coma.... I disagree with how the authors interpret EP, and part of their interpretation is "absence of pain." We've discussed that extensively here on the forum and I for one agree that "absence of pain" is neither a valid nor actionable interpretation of pleasure as the goal of life. What I find interesting in the paper, although I haven't finished reading it, is that the last half or so invalidates "absence of pain" as

an actionable goal. Or at least that's how I'm reading it so far. So the last half or so actually *supports* the position that we've come to here regarding pleasure v the absence of pain.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of November 27, 2020 at 2:43 PM**

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

What I find interesting in the paper, although I haven't finished reading it, is that the last half or so invalidates "absence of pain" as an actionable goal.

Yes they can't even maintain their fiction long enough to write an article. They are so committed to accepting the view that pleasure is "sinful" or in some way disreputable that they use "absence of pain" like they are pronouncing an enchantment to protect them from evil as they then proceed to indulge exactly the sort of pleasures that they claim are not the goal of life.