

# Is motivation to pursue pleasure the same as the motivation to remove pain?

**Post by “Kalosyni” of February 9, 2022 at 2:39 PM**

To state this question in the opposite order:

Is the motivation to remove pain the same as the motivation to pursue pleasure?

I think that there are differences, and the differences will create different outcomes.

For example, if I want to remove the mental pain of loneliness, how does this compare with the goal of seeking the pleasure of friends?

The framing of the problem is different in seeking pleasure vs removal of pain.

If we start with the uncomfortable feelings of mental pain and then ask how to remove them, then we might arrive at a list of possible ways to remove the pain...one option of which is to seek the pleasure of friendship.

Once we have determined that this is the best option to remove the pain of loneliness, then we must switch to a "pleasure optimising" goal...which would answer the question: "How can I best find the pleasure of friends?"

This seeking of pleasure will then lead to more and better options for ending the mental pain of loneliness.

We use a "short-cut" when we study Epicureanism, Principle Doctrine 27:

27. Of all the things that wisdom provides for the complete happiness of one's entire life, by far the greatest is friendship.

I am curious to hear other's thoughts on pursuit of pleasure vs. removal of pain, ...do these appear the same or different?

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**Post by “smoothiekiwi” of February 9, 2022 at 3:07 PM**

I would say, yes and no. Obviously, sometimes my desire to remove pain is in alignment to create new pleasure- e.g., when I turn on the heat in the winter, I minimize the coldness and create a warm, cozy atmosphere.

At the same time, that doesn't mean that it's always the case. A few weeks ago, I went with a friend out into the cold exterior, and enjoyed the talk. The pain from coldness was a different one than the pleasure of friendship. I find it difficult to compare these two sorts, as one of them is physical, while the other one is psychological.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of February 10, 2022 at 1:10 AM

Generally speaking, for me the motivation to pursue pleasure is "positive" whereas the motivation to remove pain is "negative". Focusing on the positive leads to a far more pleasant life and greater agency than focusing on the negative, and I find that over time that which I focus on tends to gain even more of my focus. The example of "don't think about an elephant" is pertinent, as this makes you think about an elephant.

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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Once we have determined that this is the best option to remove the pain of loneliness, then we must switch to a "pleasure optimising" goal...which would answer the question: "How can I best find the pleasure of friends?"

This seeking of pleasure will then lead to more and better options for ending the mental pain of loneliness.

This quote is a good illustration of how the process works: it's important to be aware of our pain so that we can address it. Both pleasure and pain are guides. This works for loneliness, stress, sickness, hunger, overeating, overstimulation, anger, sleepiness &c. I've been faced at times (as I imagine many of us have) with lengthy periods of overwhelming stress, chronic illness and the like. Trying to remove the pain always causes me to focus even more on the pain, whereas acknowledging the pain and pursuing pleasure has led me to much better outcomes. Often it might be just taking "baby steps" of agency, little nibbles of pleasure leading toward a larger

meal.

As I age it becomes evident that the pains in life will increase. Bodily aches and pains, losing friends and family, loved ones suffering, changes in the world.... With this in mind it's interesting to ponder that some studies have documented people's happiness increasing as they age. For me, the more that I live through, the more understanding I have that pursuing pleasure and being grateful for this random existence is really the only way to live.

The short answer: No, the motivation to pursue pleasure is not the same as the motivation to remove pain.

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## Post by "Kalosyni" of February 10, 2022 at 11:18 AM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Trying to remove the pain always causes me to focus even more on the pain, whereas acknowledging the pain and pursuing pleasure has led me to much better outcomes. Often it might be just taking "baby steps" of agency, little nibbles of pleasure leading toward a larger meal.

Focusing on the problem makes the pain more observable also. It's important to see that if one just launches into pursuing pleasure then there is a chance that is it just a temporary "band-aid"...although there could be a place for this in some situations.

Speaking of "nibbles of pleasure leading toward a larger meal"...the food analogy brings up a common problem of using food to cope with mental pain, especially fun foods and treats, which will result in weight gain and health problems down the road.

There is the need to address the root cause of the mental pain, or you may end up not ending the pain, as well as developing some kind of addiction to mask the pain.

So first analyze the situation and to find the best way to remove pain, then add in pleasure into that mode...the medicine of removing pain may be bitter, but make sure to also add some honey to the rim of the glass.

In a best case scenario, I can imagine an Epicurean community in which everyone lived in the same city or nearby, and we could help each other out...and this would be similar to Christian church communities such a "barn raisings" etc.

## Post by “Cassius” of February 10, 2022 at 11:39 AM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

It's important to see that if one just launches into pursuing pleasure then there is a chance that is it just a temporary "band-aid"...although there could be a place for this in some situations.

Yes I agree with this. Another reason is that of course we often choose pain for the larger-scale results, so even when we are in pain we might need to choose MORE pain (temporarily) to get out of the particular situation we are in.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of February 10, 2022 at 12:46 PM

There's also a matter of degree. For instance there are times when I've just powered through situations, whereas if I had allowed myself to be more aware of my Feelings I might have prevented future increasing stress and disease. (These situations occurred before I was aware of EP and was operating more from my Christian upbringing.) In my experience, situations which lead to chronic pain (mental or physical) tend to begin very gradually and develop over time. So it's always important to be aware of pleasure and pain in making choices and avoidances.

I also agree that it's possible to try to paper over pain with pleasure, with detrimental results. Responding to pain and pursuing pleasure should both be done prudently. And, yes, sometimes it's effective to choose something painful in order to obtain a greater pleasure.

However in response to the original question about the motivation to pursue pleasure or avoid pain, I don't see these as the same. The only Feelings are pleasure and pain, and absence of pain is therefore equivalent to pleasure. But I see the motivation to pursue pleasure as multi-faceted, as is the motivation to avoid pain. And I see the motivation to pursue pleasure as different from the motivation to avoid pain. To me this is an important distinction.

But thinking further, how important is the distinction? If a baby or an animal has an "instinct" toward pleasure and away from pain, are we as adults any different? We still have that "instinct". The difference is that we override our instinct due to other motivations. On the instinctual level of the organism the "motivations" might be the same. But on the conscious, thinking level I think the motivations come from and/or lead to a mindset over time. In this way they are different, and lead to different results.