

Slider models of pleasure vs. pain

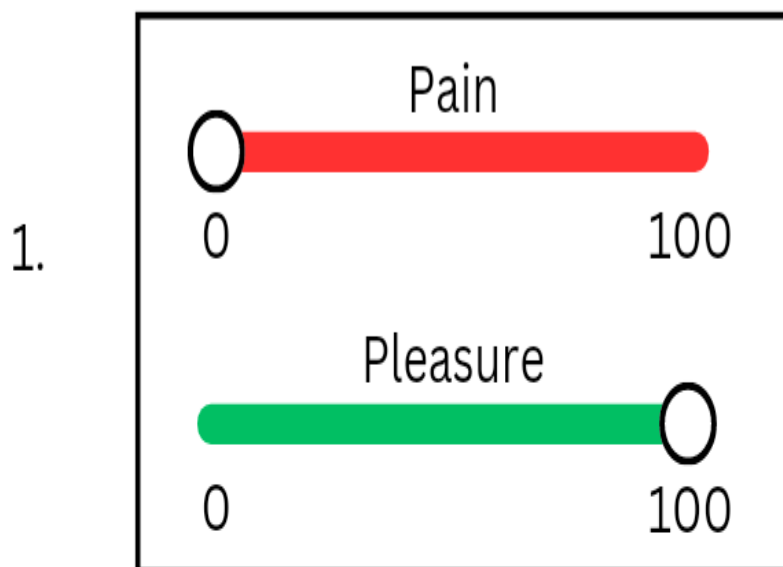
Post by “Kalosyni” of April 17, 2023 at 4:49 PM

I created this graphic as an attempt to illustrate possible ways to think of pleasure and pain as varying levels on a slider. This may need to be changed, and please let me know if there might be other ways to illustrate, or further questions.

Also, the following points:

1. When pain is removed it produces an experience of relief which is felt to be a kind of pleasure.
2. Even when one part of the body is in pain, pleasure can be felt in another part of the body.
3. At times mental pleasures can feel stronger than bodily pains.
4. Pleasure can only be varied (but not increased) once pain is removed.

Slider Models of Varying Levels of Pleasure and Pain



When pain is removed it produces an experience of relief which is felt to be a kind of pleasure. Even when one part of the body is in pain, pleasure can be felt in another part of the body. At times mental pleasures can feel stronger than bodily pains. Pleasure can only be varied (but not increased) once pain is removed.

Post by “Kalosyni” of April 17, 2023 at 5:25 PM

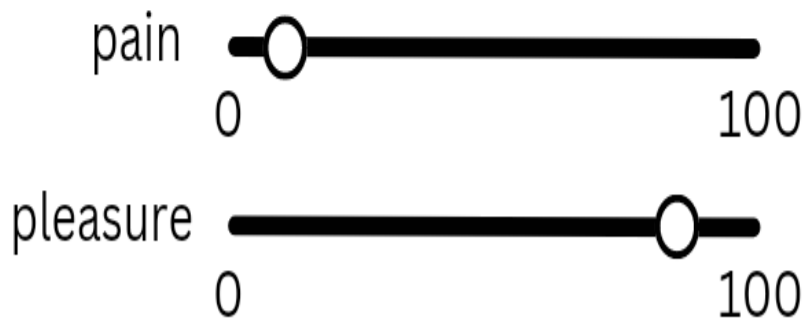
And this:

Awareness of both mind and body at the same time:

Pleasure and pain in the **mind**



Pleasure and pain in the **body**



Post by "Cassius" of April 17, 2023 at 6:41 PM

Relevant citations to incorporate in this analysis:

[PD02](#). [Death is nothing to us](#), for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us.

[PD03](#). The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once."

[PD18](#). The pleasure in the flesh is not increased when once the pain due to want is removed, but is only varied: and the limit as regards pleasure in the mind is begotten by the reasoned understanding of these very pleasures, and of the emotions akin to them, which used to cause the greatest fear to the mind.

Diogenes Laertius Biography of Epicurus: "The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined. "

Torquatus in On Ends:

"Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?"

"[38] Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension."

"[39] But actually at Athens, as my father used to tell me, when he wittily and humorously ridiculed the Stoics, there is in the Ceramicus a statue of Chrysippus, sitting with his hand extended, which hand indicates that he was fond of the following little argument: *Does your hand, being in its present condition, feel the lack of anything at all? Certainly of nothing. But if pleasure were the supreme good, it would feel a lack. I agree. Pleasure then is not the supreme good.* My father used to say that even a statue would not talk in that way, if it had power of speech. The inference is shrewd enough as against the Cyrenaics, but does not touch Epicurus. For if the only pleasure were that which, as it were, tickles the senses, if I may say so, and attended by sweetness overflows them and insinuates itself into them, neither the hand nor any other member would be able to rest satisfied with the absence of pain apart from a joyous

activity of pleasure. But if it is the highest pleasure, as Epicurus believes, to be in no pain, then the first admission, that the hand in its then existing condition felt no lack, was properly made to you, Chrysippus, but the second improperly, I mean that it would have felt a lack had pleasure been the supreme good. It would certainly feel no lack, and on this ground, that anything which is cut off from the state of pain is in the state of pleasure."

"Now we admit that mental pleasures and pains spring from bodily pleasures and pains; so I allow what you alleged just now, that any of our school who differ from this opinion are out of court; and indeed I see there are many such, but unskilled thinkers. I grant that although mental pleasure brings us joy and mental pain brings us trouble, yet each feeling takes its rise in the body and is dependent on the body, though it does not follow that the pleasures and pains of the mind do not greatly surpass those of the body. With the body indeed we can perceive only what is present to us at the moment, but with the mind the past and future also. For granting that we feel just as great pain when our body is in pain, still mental pain may be very greatly intensified if we imagine some everlasting and unbounded evil to be menacing us. And we may apply the same argument to pleasure, so that it is increased by the absence of such fears. [56] By this time so much at least is plain, that the intensest pleasure or the intensest annoyance felt in the mind exerts more influence on the happiness or wretchedness of life than either feeling, when present for an equal space of time in the body. We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain."

Diogenes of Oinoanda

Fragment 34:

Let us first discuss states, keeping an eye on the point that, when the emotions which disturb the soul are removed, those which produce pleasure enter into it to take their place. Well, what are the disturbing emotions? [They are] fears —of the gods, of death, and of [pains]— and, besides [these], desires that [outrun] the limits fixed by nature. These are the roots of all evils, and, [unless] we cut them off, [a multitude] of evils will grow [upon] us.

(I put that "desires that outrun the limits fixed by nature" in red not because it is related to the current topic, but because that seems to me to be a good choice of words to describe something we often struggle with as "neither natural nor necessary" or all sorts of other adjectives." Seems to me that the factor that unites them all is that they "outrun the limits fixed by nature.")

Post by “Godfrey” of April 17, 2023 at 7:40 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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At first blush that sounds quite good, but I'm beginning to wonder if, to some, that might imply a limit that is the same for everybody. With all due respect to Diogenes, would a better phrasing be "desires that outrun the limits fixed by *one's* nature"?

Post by “Martin” of April 18, 2023 at 2:49 PM

Regarding Comment #2, attributing pleasure and pain to sub-pleasures and sub-pains is an auxiliary construction which may help understanding. However, it is the total effect of external and inner sensations which creates the feeling of pleasure/pain. There are no intermediate subsystems which have their own feelings of pleasure/pain.

It is the total effect which determines where we are on the pleasure/pain scale.

Post by “Cassius” of April 18, 2023 at 3:30 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

At first blush that sounds quite good, but I'm beginning to wonder if, to some, that might imply a limit that is the same for everybody. With all due respect to Diogenes, would a better phrasing be "desires that outrun the limits fixed by *one's* nature"?

I agree that the standard is one's own circumstances and what Nature has provided in those circumstances. There's no wider intent or absolute standard other than what nature has provided. If you're from a family where everyone lives to 100 then you're reasonable in desiring

to live to 100. If you're from a family where everyone has physical issues that causes death at 30 then it's less likely to be a good bet to worry about living to 100.

So I agree, but I am not sure that it theoretically even makes sense to consider the implication that you are questioning - maybe it should be so clear to us that Nature works through particulars, and not through ideal patterns, that we should never use ideal patterns as a starting point for consideration.

Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2023 at 3:36 PM

as to Martin's comment

Quote

Regarding Comment [#2](#), attributing pleasure and pain to sub-pleasures and sub-pains is an auxiliary construction which may help understanding. However, it is the total effect of external and inner sensations which creates the feeling of pleasure/pain. There are no intermediate subsystems which have their own feelings of pleasure/pain.

The reference to "intermediate subsystems" seems to me to be related to the issues raised by Chrysippus' "hand question." Atoms don't feel pleasure and pain, and it's not at all clear that we would say that individual cells do - it takes more organization and up the system before pain and pleasure register. By the time you get to a hand it definitely feels pleasure and pain, but so do lots of other parts of the body at the same time, and you have to consider as Martin says "the total effect."

I think it would be excellent to set as a goal for both the book review and the forum to turn that example cited by Torquatus inside out until we are comfortable that we completely understand what is meant by Chryssipus' argument and why it is wrong.

We've left it floating out there ambiguously far too long, and I think the source Cicero was borrowing from to write Torquatus was right to think that it is an example that is critical to understand so we can overcome the Stoic argument.

"Pleasure" does not only refer to overt active stimulation. The act of experiencing any part of life without pain should be considered to be an act of experiencing pleasure. That's the only way the logic-chopping arguments against Epicurus and pleasure can be defeated. Anytime "absence of pain" is stated we should immediately infer and treat it the same as if "presence of pleasure" had been stated.

And the difficulties in making that point clear would appear to be why Chrysippus used the argument and Torquatus brings it up to ridicule it. Leaving the issue ambiguous leads to all sorts of difficulties. People normally don't refer to absence of pain as a pleasure, and those who don't know Epicurus' philosophical context think the wording is ridiculous or that he is saying something mysterious. Worse, it opens the door to argue that "absence of pain" really means "tranquility," which improperly elevates tranquility to something more than simply one among many important pleasures. And that improper elevation makes it easy to think that tranquility is all we need, that tranquility is outside of and higher than pleasure itself, and that we don't really need or want pleasure at all. Stoics and Buddhists and all sorts of other "spiritualists" jump all over this to make Epicurus seem like one of them.

Saying that the goal is to rid one's experience from pains is exactly the same thing as saying that the goal is filling one's experience with pleasures.

And that's the same as saying that the goal of "Absence of Pain" is exactly the same as the goal of "Presence of Pleasure."

And that equivalence is why - and only why - it is appropriate to say that "the greatest pleasure" is "the absence of pain." As [PD03](#) says, "the limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once."

All this works because we have ascertained that there's no true middle ground between pleasure and pain. Once we've ascertained that, we can see that it's totally inappropriate to think that this middle ground (which does not exist) is "tranquility." But that's exactly the incorrect deduction that a lot of people (especially those of Buddhist or Stoic bent) are reading into Epicurus.

Again, the cite:

Quote from Torquatus from On Ends

"[38] Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension."

"[39] But actually at Athens, as my father used to tell me, when he wittily and humorously ridiculed the Stoics, there is in the Ceramicus a statue of Chrysippus, sitting with his hand extended, which hand indicates that he was fond of the following little argument: *Does your hand, being in its present condition, feel the lack of anything*

at all? Certainly of nothing. But if pleasure were the supreme good, it would feel a lack. I agree. Pleasure then is not the supreme good. My father used to say that even a statue would not talk in that way, if it had power of speech. The inference is shrewd enough as against the Cyrenaics, but does not touch Epicurus. For if the only pleasure were that which, as it were, tickles the senses, if I may say so, and attended by sweetness overflows them and insinuates itself into them, neither the hand nor any other member would be able to rest satisfied with the absence of pain apart from a joyous activity of pleasure. But if it is the highest pleasure, as Epicurus believes, to be in no pain, then the first admission, that the hand in its then existing condition felt no lack, was properly made to you, Chrysippus, but the second improperly, I mean that it would have felt a lack had pleasure been the supreme good. It would certainly feel no lack, and on this ground, that anything which is cut off from the state of pain is in the state of pleasure."

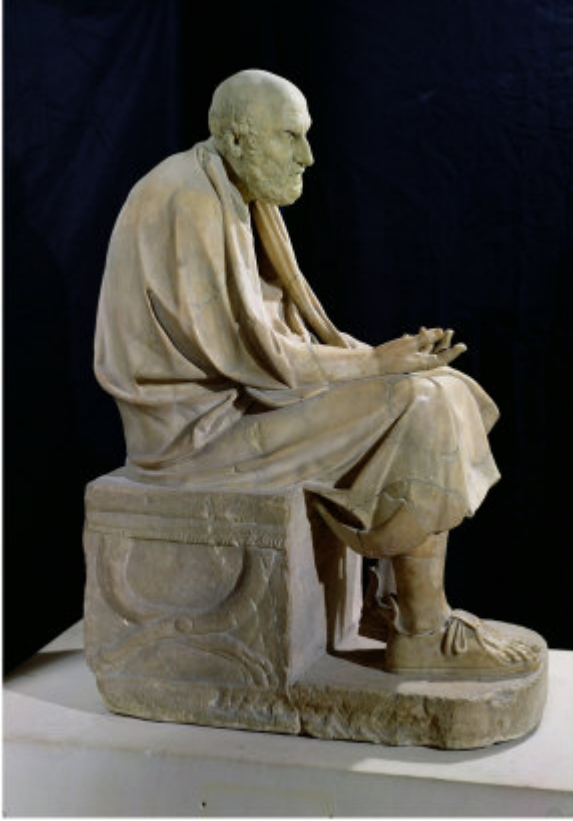
That's the Reid translation and it's worth emphasizing the final line:

"Anything which is cut off from the state of pain is in the state of pleasure."

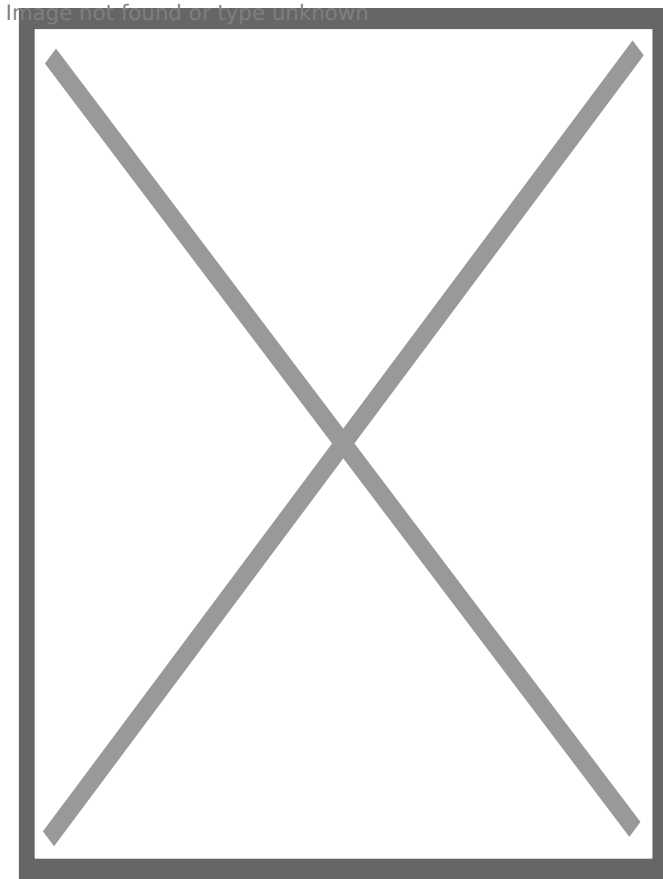
Any full presentation of Epicurean philosophy has to incorporate the issue being discussed here. Chrysippus and his Stoics may have made this confusion worse through their arguments, but we can use the fact that Cicero / Torquatus preserved those arguments to illustrate why they are wrong and what Epicurus really meant.

Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2023 at 3:47 PM

James Warren raised the issue, but did not write much about it, here:



[View image](#)



[Chrysippus' hand](#)

I gave a short paper today to the 1st c. BC philosophy research group on this chapter from Cicero's De Finibus (1.39). It's part of a long...

kenodoxia.blogspot.com

Post by "Don" of April 18, 2023 at 4:31 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

By the time you get to a hand it definitely feels pleasure and pain, but so do lots of other parts of the body at the same time, and you have to consider as Martin says "the total effect."

I'd point out that "the hand" doesn't feel pleasure or pain. The individual can sense pain or pleasure in different body parts, but it's not the body part that "feels" the sensation. It is our minds connected to that part. Sever the hand, the hand feels neither pleasure nor pain... But the individual sure would!!

Post by “Godfrey” of April 18, 2023 at 6:15 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So I agree, but I am not sure that it theoretically even makes sense to consider the implication that you are questioning - maybe it should be so clear to us that Nature works through particulars, and not through ideal patterns, that we should never use ideal patterns as a starting point for consideration.

It depends on who "us" is.... I made the distinction between "nature" and "one's nature" to make it perfectly clear that nature works through particulars since we're constantly in philosophical sparring with the idealists. Additionally, it's not uncommon for people to try to meld idealist ideas with EP. Ideas such as fancy pleasures and absence of pain, just for starters. We shouldn't be using any wording that allows idealist concepts to bleed over, imho.