

# The Definitive "Chrysippus' Hand Argument" Thread

Post by "Cassius" of April 18, 2023 at 8:47 PM



Earlier today, after revisiting the "Chrysippus hand argument" from Torquatus' "On Ends" speech, I am unlike Chrysippus' hand - have a lack for something - and that something is a Definitive Thread on the topic. I would like to eventually make a graphic for the front page of the website that highlights this episode in the Epicurean texts because I think it is a good way to focus on a critical issue. We have discussed the issue previously a number of times, probably more than the two threads listed below, and I know we discussed it in the Lucretius Today podcast when we went through the Torquatus material.

But I am convinced from my own lack of comfort with this passage that there is a lot more to be learned. Chrysippus and/or the Stoics seemed to think that this argument against pleasure as the good was a killer, significant enough to be featured in the statue dedicated to his memory - at least if Torquatus's story can be credited as supporting that conclusion.

So the first thing I will do in this thread is to quote again the Reid translation of the relevant passage, and before going further, I would like to challenge anyone who has the time to contribute - before we go much further - their explanation of what he is arguing. Before we can deal with whether he is right or wrong, we first have to understand what he is saying, and it seems clear that there are some underlying and unstated presumptions behind his framing of the question that have to be brought to the surface.

First, here is the quote:

## Quote

[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.

As to underlying but unstated presumptions, there seems to be something going on in the assertion: "*But if pleasure were the supreme good, it would feel a lack.*"

Chrysippus seems to expect us to take as a given that hand would feel the absence of the supreme good at that moment if the supreme good were pleasure. Is that an assertion with which everyone would agree? What is it presuming that might need to be brought to the surface? That one characteristic of the supreme good is that it is always present and - if absent - that the presence would be felt immediately? Why would that be so and what is the implication of it?

I don't think we can understand Chrysippus' assertion, or Torquatus' explanation of why it is wrong, if we don't understand that point.

Anyone want to try to explain in their own words what Chrysippus is saying and why?

Prior Threads:

1 - [Starting here in a thread from 2021](#) (probably the best existing thread)

2 - [Comments in Kalosyni's "Slider" thread of 2023](#)

#HighestGood

## Post by "Godfrey" of April 18, 2023 at 9:31 PM

It seems as if he's trying to make a case for a neutral state as a way of disproving pleasure as the highest good. But, if that's true, his argument makes no sense. If there's no neutral state, and the hand feels no lack, then it is experiencing pleasure. He's set up a false argument with "if pleasure is the supreme good, it would feel a lack," complete with a Platonic stooge to agree with the incorrect assertions.

At least that's all I can get out of it 😞

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## Post by "Don" of April 18, 2023 at 9:45 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Platonic stooge



## Post by "Joshua" of April 18, 2023 at 10:04 PM

Premises;

1. The hand either feels pleasure, or it feels pain, or it feels neither pleasure nor pain.
2. If pleasure is the highest good, then the absence of pleasure would feel like a lack of pleasure.
3. This lack of pleasure would be felt in every member of the body.
4. My hand does not feel pleasure or pain.
5. My hand does not feel a lack of pleasure.

Conclusion;

1. Pleasure is not the highest good.

Against premises 1, 2, and 4:

(Principle Doctrine 3) "The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. When such pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together."

Torquatus grants premise 3:

"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."

The wisdom of granting this premise is, in my view, questionable. Premise 5 relies upon it for relevance, and I think it has problems. For example; I can feel pain from teeth, but unlike other organs the teeth do not register actively pleasureable sensations. Should the teeth, not equipped with the ability to register pleasure, feel the lack of pleasure? I don't see how.

Against premise 5;

Premise 5 relies on the previous premises 1-4 for relevance. Given the challenges presented above, premise 5 is inadmissible.

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## **Post by "Don" of April 18, 2023 at 10:07 PM**

I'm going to break down this dialogue (C for Chryssipus; S for Stooge):

*C: Does your hand, being in its present condition, feel the lack of anything at all?*

*S: Certainly of nothing.*

*C: But if pleasure were the supreme good, it would feel a lack.*

*S: I agree.*

*C: Pleasure then is not the supreme good.*

For good measure, here's the Latin:

—'Numquidnam manus tua sic affecta, quem ad modum affecta nunc est, desiderat?'

—Nihil sane.

—'At, si voluptas esset bonum, desideraret.'

—Ita credo.

— “Non est igitur voluptas bonum.”

That's it. That's the whole "story." Here's my response:

Your hand doesn't "feel" anything. You may sense something with your hand, on your hand, in your hand, and so on; but your hand, in its present condition, is merely a part of your sensory apparatus. If you feel that your hand doesn't lack anything, it's in homeostasis. It is in balance. That balance is pleasurable by definition because it is not painful. You are already feeling pleasure in your hand. Chryssipus is simply not accepting Epicurus's premise that there is only pleasure and pain, and then forging ahead to make a point regardless of Epicurus's position.

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

That one characteristic of the supreme good is that it is always present and - if absent - that the presence would be felt immediately?

The supreme good is not always present. It is that to which all other actions aim for. We are always striving to achieve the supreme good. Chryssipus is saying that if the hand didn't "want" anything, if it didn't "want" pleasure, then pleasure can't be the supreme good because we should always strive to gain the supreme good. Epicurus would say that the feeling of freedom from pain IS pleasurable, is pleasure, and so "the hand" IS already experiencing the supreme good which is pleasure.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of April 19, 2023 at 12:44 AM**

This also gets to the question of whether, in a purely material universe, there is a supreme good. Organisms have a highest level goal, but that's quite different from an idealized supreme good.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of April 19, 2023 at 12:49 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Chryssipus is saying that if the hand didn't "want" anything, if it didn't "want" pleasure, then pleasure can't be the supreme good because we should always strive to gain the supreme good.

Very well said. So another mistake by Chryssipus is that according to his argument, virtue can't be the supreme good. For that matter, nothing can be. But I may be missing something: it's been a long day.

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### Post by “Don” of April 19, 2023 at 7:14 AM

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

This also gets to the question of whether, in a purely material universe, there is a supreme good. Organisms have a highest level goal, but that's quite different from an idealized supreme good.

The "highest level goal" (τέλος telos) = "the supreme good" (summum bonum).

They're the same thing. One is simply the translation of the other.

The supreme/highest good is simply that to which all our actions point, the goal to which we strive, the answer to "why do you do what you do?"

For Epicurus, pleasure is that. Keep piling on enough answers for those why's and you end at pleasure at the top, the highest good thing in the widest sense.

For the Stoics, it's somehow "to be virtuous."

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### Post by “Don” of April 19, 2023 at 8:12 AM

#### Quote from Cicero

The inference is shrewd enough as against the Cyrenaics, but does not touch Epicurus.

This is because the Cyrenaics didn't accept that homeostasis, balance, ataraxia was pleasure. If "the hand" was in a balanced, homeostatic state, the Cyrenaics didn't accept that as pleasure.

They called that a neutral state. Epicurus didn't accept that premise. Everything for him was either pleasure or pain.

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2023 at 9:34 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

Your hand doesn't "feel" anything. You may sense something with your hand, on your hand, in your hand, and so on; but your hand, in its present condition, is merely a part of your sensory apparatus. If you feel that your hand doesn't lack anything, it's in homeostasis. It is in balance.

While I think this angle of approach is true, I don't think it meets directly what Chrysippus was saying so I wouldn't start with this one. I don't see any reason why he could not have picked out any other part of the body, or even a total person, and made the same point, just so long as that person was sitting quietly and not being stimulated from the outside.

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Very well said. So another mistake by Chryssipus is that according to his argument, virtue can't be the supreme good. For that matter, nothing can be. But I may be missing something: it's been a long day.

That's the feeling I have - that we are missing something that from Chrysippus' point of view is vital.

Referring to Joshua's list:

### [Quote from Joshua](#)

1. The hand either feels pleasure, or it feels pain, or it feels neither pleasure nor pain.
2. If pleasure is the highest good, then the absence of pleasure would feel like a lack of pleasure.
3. This lack of pleasure would be felt in every member of the body.
4. My hand does not feel pleasure or pain.

5. My hand does not feel a lack of pleasure.

1 - Don's comment goes to 1, but I think that to be fair to Chrysippus that 1 is a reasonable premise that most people would accept under normal discussion. Now Epicurus would not accept the last phrase "or it feels neither pleasure nor pain" but that's the subject in question that we're trying to prove, so I don't know we can object to it here at this point in the argument.

2- I am thinking that 2 is the missing link in our comprehension. WHY would this be the case? As Don asks why would the highest good necessarily be present at all times? What gives Chrysippus the right to presume that? At the moment the main thing that occurs to me is that rather than highest good the operative perspective is more "guide" than "highest good" and we would want our "guide" to be always present in order for it to truly be our ultimate guide. But that may not be the point or it may be only a part of the point. But SOMEHOW there is a reason behind this presumption that Chrysippus thought that we would accept, and quite possibly that we would accept it even as Cyreniacs or Epicureans devoted to the central role of pleasure.

3 - I am not sure about that one, but yes I can see that being presumed, in order to pick out the hand.

4 - Yes he's presuming a state of inactivity does not involve pleasure or pain.

5 - Yes he's presuming that too, and that is something that we would probably accept.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2023 at 10:29 AM**

I was looking for a passage that I thought I remembered from Lucian, where he remarked (or so I thought) that it was surprising or un-Stoic to look for an ever-present "guide." Unfortunately I cannot find what I am looking for, but while looking I found this, a cute list of illustrations of the type of logic as the guide of life to which Lucian and presumably Epicurus objected. This is from an appendix to the Fowler translation of the Works of Lucian of Samosata:

pure reason, as opposed to emotion, for the guide of life, resulted in much attention to logic, including its paradoxical forms. Among these logical puzzles are the following: (1) Sorites, the heap trick. Suppose a heap of corn. Is it a heap? Yes. Take a grain away. Is it a heap? Yes. And so on, till only one grain is left. The drawing of the line is impossible. (2) The Horns. If you have not lost a thing, you still have it?

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*Notes explanatory of*

Certainly. Have you lost your horns? No. Then you are horned. (3) The Crocodile. A child is caught by a crocodile; the father asks him to give it back. I will, says the crocodile, on condition that you tell me correctly whether I shall do so or not. The dilemma is obvious. (4) The Day and Night. This appears to be a proof that there is no such thing as night, through the ambiguity in 'Day being, Night cannot be,' which in Greek, though not in English, is equally natural in the sense of Since it is day, it cannot be night, and, If day exists, night cannot. (5) The Reaper. I will prove to you that you will not reap your corn, thus. If you reap it, you will not either-reap-or-not-reap, but reap. If you do not reap it, you will not either-reap-or-not-reap, but not reap. So in each case you will not either reap or not reap, that is, there will be no reaping. (6) The Rightful Owner. Unexplained; but *see* Epictetus, ii, xix. (7) and (8) The Electra, and The Man in the Hood, sufficiently explained in *Sale of Creeds* (22).

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**Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2023 at 12:04 PM**

IF (and I am not taking that as established) we were to conclude that the issue Chrysippus is alluding to is that the guide or the greatest good must be continuously present (for some

combination of practical or philosophical reasons that we still need to clarify) , then we have DeWitt's explanation of the "continuity" issue in the following clips.

It boils down to:

hedonism as a practical code of conduct for mankind. No philosophy that offered merely intermittent intervals of pleasure would have possessed any broad or cogent appeal for those in quest of the happy life.

The argument is most fully stated in the section "Pleasure can be Continuous" on page 239. Here are two isolated references, then part of the section devoted to the topic so people can

#### THE NATURAL CEILINGS OF PLEASURE

Having established body and soul upon a parity, equal partners in life, Epicurus next proceeded to propound a number of paradoxes: first, that limits of pleasure were set by Nature, beyond which no increase was possible; second, that pleasure was one and not many; and third, that **continuous** pleasure was possible. These new doctrines were the offspring of controversy, because the contrary doctrines had been sponsored by Plato and his followers, who in this instance agreed for the most part with the multitude.

It is plain to see how Epicurus was led to switch emphasis to this aspect of pleasure. As usual, he was working his way to greater precision in his analysis of the subject and, as will presently be shown in more detail, he discerned that according to Aristippus and Plato no such thing as **continuous** pleasure was possible; they recognized only peaks of pleasure separated by intervals either devoid of pleasure or neutral or mixed. From this it followed with inevitable logic that the wise man could not be happy at all times. This conclusion was repugnant to Epicurus as a thoroughgoing hedonist and was repudiated. This repudiation could be made good only by vindicating for freedom from fear and pain the status of a positive pleasure. This in turn resulted in a doctrine of the unity of all pleasure.

The apex of the new structure of ethics erected by Epicurus consists in the teaching that pleasure can be continuous. The discovery of a logical basis for this proposition was essential for the promulgation of hedonism as a practical code of conduct for mankind. No philosophy that offered merely intermittent intervals of pleasure would have possessed any broad or cogent appeal for those in quest of the happy life.

The predecessors of Epicurus had spent considerable thought upon the analysis of pleasure, but their attitude was in the main merely analytical and academic, lacking relevance to action. Their zeal was not for promoting the happiness of mankind. They were rather in the position of men who give themselves to the study of anatomy without contemplating the practice of medicine. The attitude of Epicurus, on the contrary, was pragmatic from the beginning. The declaration that "Vain is the word of that philosopher by which no malady of mankind is healed" has already been quoted.<sup>51</sup>

The desired logical basis for the continuity of pleasure was afforded by the discovery of natural ceilings of pleasures. From this is derived the division into basic and ornamental or superfluous pleasures, corresponding respectively to natural and necessary desires and those that are neither natural nor necessary. Hunger and thirst exemplify the

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the second class. Correspondingly, the satisfaction of normal hunger and thirst is a basic pleasure while the gratification of abnormal desires for rich foods and drinks is ornamental and superfluous.

This recognition of basic pleasures, in its turn, signified the recognition of a normal state of being, consisting of health of mind and of body and freedom from fears and all unnecessary desires, which was called ataraxy or serenity. This condition was denominated static, but allowance must be made for a certain variation. Hunger and thirst recur and call for satisfaction, which is a moderately kinetic pleasure, whereupon the individual returns to the normal state of absence of pain. Epicurus describes it in one of those reciprocal statements for which he had a preference: "Only then have we need of pleasure when from the absence of pleasure we feel pain, and when we do not feel pain we no longer feel need of pleasure."<sup>52</sup> While these words have reference to the natural desires of the body, the description of the normal state must be understood to include freedom from pain in the body and distress in the mind.

The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument,<sup>53</sup> but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings

would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

Even at the present day the same objection is raised. For instance, a modern Platonist, ill informed on the true intent of Epicurus, has this to say: "What, in a word, is to be said of a philosophy that begins by regarding pleasure as the only positive good and ends by emptying pleasure of all positive content?"<sup>54</sup> This ignores the fact that this was but one of the definitions of pleasure offered by Epicurus, that he recognized kinetic as well as static pleasures. It ignores also the fact that Epicurus took personal pleasure in public festivals and encouraged

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#### THE NEW HEDONISM

his disciples to attend them and that regular banquets were a part of the ritual of the sect. Neither does it take account of the fact that in the judgment of Epicurus those who feel the least need of luxury enjoy it most and that intervals of abstinence enhance the enjoyment of luxury.<sup>55</sup> Thus the Platonic objector puts upon himself the necessity of denying that the moderation of the rest of the year furnishes additional zest to the enjoyment of the Christmas dinner; he has failed to become aware of the Epicurean zeal for "condensing pleasure."

On a level with this criticism is the allegation of a more recent writer that Epicurus put himself in a corner by defining pleasure as freedom from pain.<sup>56</sup> It was not Epicurus who put himself in a corner but rather Aristippus and Plato, who by recognizing only peaks of pleasure separated by intervals either void of pleasure or neutral or mixed, rendered all continuity of pleasure impossible and consequently all continuity

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**Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2023 at 12:17 PM**

and the rest:

of happiness. The error of the modern critic is to allow ancient controversy to vitiate the independence of modern judgments. The ancient enemies of Epicureanism were not concerned to present a total estimate of its teachings; they pounced upon those doctrines which, when considered singly, seemed susceptible of refutation or ridicule. They kept harping upon the negative description of pleasure as freedom from pain and ignored the positive aspect as health of mind and health of body. The latter, being difficult to attack, is lacking from the hostile testimonies and survives only anonymously in the friendly tradition.

It would have been strange if this doctrine of continuous happiness were absent from the Authorized Doctrines. Its presence is easily overlooked, because the context of the controversy has become blurred with the lapse of time, but the emphasis derived from prominence of position must have been at one time arresting. It forms part of the famous tetrapharmacōn, Doctrine 3. The first part, already quoted, identifies the basic pleasure as freedom from pain, the only kind that could be continuous: "The removal of all pain is the limit of magnitude for pleasures." This rules out the "neutral state" as postulated by Plato; it identifies the neutral state as one of static pleasure. The second part of the Doctrine disposes of Plato's "mixed states": "And wherever the experience of pleasure is present, so long as it prevails, there is no pain or distress or a combination of them." This amounts to denying that pain and pleasure are capable of mixing and of resulting in a state that is different from either. Epicurus implies instead and elsewhere

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teaches that pain is subtractable from pleasure, leaving a balance of the latter.<sup>57</sup> This principle applies either to physical pain or mental distress or to both together. It is essential to the thesis that continuous pleasure is possible.

Those who denied that pleasure was the telos were naturally not concerned with the question of the continuity of pleasure, but there was an analogous question of equal consequence, whether the wise man could be happy under all circumstances. The importance of this revealed itself shortly after Plato's demise and showed no abatement for three centuries. In two passages Cicero lists the names of those who gave an affirmative answer — from which the name of Plato is conspicuously absent — and elsewhere he pretends to cite the opinion of Epicurus, misrepresenting him shamelessly and using his name as an excuse for parading a tedious collection of his own translations from Greek tragedy on the topic of pain.<sup>58</sup> What Epicurus is on record as saying is this: "Even if under torture the wise man is happy."<sup>59</sup> Cicero chose to imagine him in the brazen bull of the tyrant Phalaris, in which the victims were roasted alive, and as saying "How pleasant; how little this torture means to me!" This is a shabby invention and shameless quibbling. It ignores the difference between *suavis*, "pleasant" and *beatus*, "happy."

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## Post by “Don” of April 19, 2023 at 2:00 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

IF (and I am not taking that as established) we were to conclude that the issue Chrysippus is alluding to is that the guide or the greatest good must be continuously present (for some combination of practical or philosophical reasons that we still need to clarify) ,...

I don't think it's the continuously present part he was arguing against. It seems to have been the presence of a neutral state being called pleasure.

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2023 at 2:34 PM

Yes, but as you quoted above, it seems that Chrysippus thought that the following argument is self-contained:

*C: Does your hand, being in its present condition, feel the lack of anything at all?*

*S: Certainly of nothing.*

*C: But if pleasure were the supreme good, it would feel a lack.*

*S: I agree.*

*C: Pleasure then is not the supreme good.*

And that seems to imply that the "absence of lack" is the critical issue. He does not seem to me to be arguing about what to call the absence of lack, it is the absence of lack itself that he thinks says something.

Yes he would presumably and eventually agree with Cicero and argue that the absence of lack should not be called pleasure, but he seems to think already that the absence of lack speaks for itself as to why pleasure is not the highest good. As you also indicated earlier, I see no reason why the highest good should be required to be always present. There seems to be an element missing in Chrysippus' argument that would explain why he thinks it must always be present. The only possibility I can think of is the implicit requirement that the highest good (or the guide to the highest good) must be always available in order for it to meet some definition that

Chrysippus thinks is agreed upon as to the nature of the highest good or guide to the highest good.

Is there any other possible reason for his argument? He could have simply said "the absence of any feeling is not pleasure and no one thinks of it that way" if his argument was over nothing more than what to call the state being discussed. That's what Cicero eventually argued, but Chrysippus does not seem to be saying that. He is saying that the "absence of lack" means something in and of itself as to why pleasure is not the good.

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### **Post by “Don” of April 19, 2023 at 3:03 PM**

Running Chryssipus' line thru Google translate:

"Does your hand, so affected, as it is now affected, long for it?"

That final desiderat can mean desire or long for. Lack has different semantic baggage in English.

It seems to me that he's saying if pleasure is the highest good, how could your hand (or whatever body part) desire pleasure (since it's the highest good to which we're supposed to strive) if it was in a state in which it didn't desire anything. How could it be in a state where it didn't desire the highest good? Epicurus would say it's exactly that state of no pain that is pleasure itself, as opposed to the Cyrenaics who would claim that is a neutral state, neither pleasure nor pain.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2023 at 4:25 PM**

I don't know that the difference between lack or long for makes a difference, but I think the rest is interesting. Apparently the stoics agreed with Epicurus that Nature is the standard. Chrysippus would also have known that Epicurus said to look to babies for the pure standard. Maybe chrysippus was saying "I will up you Epicurus and look to a hand, which is TOTALLY uncorrupted since it has no mind to corrupt."

Maybe.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of April 19, 2023 at 5:56 PM

That's an interesting take on it.

Is the argument of Chrysippus specific to pleasure, or is it regarding the highest good? I'm again thinking of virtue: do Stoics consider that you can reach a state where you are virtuous, and therefore don't long for it any more? This could be analogous to a homeostatic state of pleasure, in his mind. But that doesn't seem to work in this case either, although it does work for an argument against virtue as the greatest good.

Does anybody know a Stoic to ask about this? Personally, the argument seems to me to be so absurd as to be meaningless but that's probably not the case for somebody serious about Stoicism.

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## Post by “Don” of April 19, 2023 at 6:09 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Does anybody know a Stoic to ask about this? Personally, the argument seems to me to be so absurd as to be meaningless but that's probably not the case for somebody serious about Stoicism.

Is it, in the end, just a reductio ad absurdum?

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2023 at 6:43 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

I'm again thinking of virtue: do Stoics consider that you can reach a state where you are virtuous, and therefore don't long for it any more?

I think that is a definite yes - when you get to the summit you are at the top and there is nothing greater.

Cant call a cite but I am pretty sure the summit analogy is a favorite, and that is another argument they use against pleasure - that it has no summit or limit.

We can hold this question out there as long as needs be because I would surely think that they took it seriously

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### **Post by “Don” of April 19, 2023 at 6:57 PM**

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

I'm again thinking of virtue: do Stoics consider that you can reach a state where you are virtuous, and therefore don't long for it any more?

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I think that is a definite yes - when you get to the summit you are at the top and there is nothing greater.

I remember Emily Austin said that the Stoics didn't think anyone could really attain perfect virtue. The analogy was that you can drown just as easily in an inch of water as in the ocean: it's an all or nothing... And no one can be all virtuous all the time.

I think that's why the Christians allowed the Stoic strain to seep into their doctrines... We're all sinners. Even a little sin is still sin. Etc...

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### **Post by “Don” of April 19, 2023 at 7:20 PM**

btw I applaud [Cassius](#) 's optimism in calling this the definitive thread 😄

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### **Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2023 at 8:09 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

it's an all or nothing...

Yes -- and they are somehow convinced to go for the "All"

Again for anyone who has time on their hands, I recommend Lucian's [HERMOTIMUS](#) for background on that aspect., with an Epicurean or Epicurean-sympathizer arguing against a Stoic on some of these points.

EDIT: I know I am droning on about "Hermotimus" but for anyone who has not read it i think you are in for a big and most pleasant surprise -- it is very witty, easy to read, and covers a lot of important material from an Epicurean-Friendly perspective, in dialog form, almost as if we had our own variation of a Platonic presentation - with all of the elegance combined with wisdom as opposed to frequent deceit.

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### Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2023 at 9:15 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

btw I applaud Cassius 's optimism in calling this the definitive thread 😄

Definitive because this time we will pursue this as long as it takes! 😊

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### Post by "Don" of April 19, 2023 at 10:14 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

btw I applaud Cassius 's optimism in calling this the definitive thread 😄

Definitive because this time we will pursue this as long as it takes! 😊

Miner's helmet, check! Down the rabbit hole we go! ☑️

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 20, 2023 at 6:13 AM

I am surprised to find that there don't seem to be any academic articles devoted to this hand question.

But maybe we need to be prepared to find a number of surprising things - such as that Chrysippus is alleged to have died of laughter, and that he was extremely arrogant (the latter is not surprising). This below from [Diogenes Laertius \(Yonge\)](#) 😞

VI. But at last, when Arcesilaus and Lacydes, as Sotion records in his eighth book, came to the Academy, he joined them in the study of philosophy; from which circumstance he got the habit of arguing for and against a custom, and discussed magnitudes and quantities, following the system of the Academics.

VII. Hermippus relates, that one day, when he was teaching in the Odeum, he was invited to a sacrifice by his pupils; and, that drinking some sweet unmixed wine, he was seized with giddiness, and departed this life five days afterwards, when he had lived seventy-three years; dying in the hundred and forty-third olympiad, as Apollodorus says in his Chronicles. And we have written an epigram on him:—

Chrysippus drank with open mouth some wine  
Then became giddy, and so quickly died.  
Too little reck'd he of the Porch's weal,  
Or of his country's, or of his own dear life;  
And so descended to the realms of Hell.

But some people say that he died of a fit of immoderate laughter. For that seeing his ass eating figs, he told his old woman to give the ass some unmixed wine to drink afterwards, and then laughed so violently that he died.

VIII. He appears to have been a man of exceeding arrogance. Accordingly, though he wrote such numbers of books, he never dedicated one of them to any sovereign. And he was contented with one single old woman, as Demetrius tells us, in his People of the same Name. And when Ptolemy wrote to Cleanthes, begging him either to come to him himself or to send him some one, Sphaerus went to him, but Chrysippus slighted the invitation.

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 20, 2023 at 6:15 AM

The issue could also be a ridiculous play on words and logic like Chrysippus was known for, but if so that's exactly the kind of explanation we ought to try to understand. What is the logic of the question?

XI. Now this philosopher used to delight in proposing questions of this sort. The person who reveals the mysteries to the uninitiated commits a sin; the hierophant reveals them to the uninitiated; therefore the hierophant commits sin? Another was, that which is not in the city, is also not in the house; but a well is not in the city, therefore, there is not a well in the house. Another was, there is a certain head; that head you have not got; there is then a head that you have not got; therefore, you have not got a head. Again, if a man is in Megara, he is not in Athens; but there is a man in Megara, therefore, there is not a man in Athens. Again, if you say anything, what you say comes out of your mouth; but you say "a waggon," therefore a waggon comes out of your mouth. Another was, if you have not lost a thing, you have it; but you have not lost horns; therefore, you have horns. Though some attribute this sophism to Eubulides.

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## Post by "Cassius" of April 20, 2023 at 6:24 AM

Reference to Chrysippus vs Epicurus in writing, and to the statue in the Ceramicus - plus the meaning of Chrysippus' name! (as Don points out below - a pun!)

III. He was industrious beyond all other men; as is plain from his writings; for he wrote more than seven hundred and five books. And he often wrote several books on the same subject, wishing to put down everything that occurred to him; and constantly correcting his previous assertions, and using a great abundance of testimonies. So that, as in one of his writings he had quoted very nearly the whole of the Medea of Euripides, and some one had his book in his hands; this latter, when he was asked what he had got there, made answer, "The Medea of Chrysippus." And Apollodorus, the Athenian, in his Collection of Dogmas, wishing to assert that what Epicurus had written out of his own head, and without any quotations to support his arguments, was a great deal more than all the books of Chrysippus, speaks thus (I give his exact words), "For if any one were to take away from the books of Chrysippus all the passages which he quotes from other authors, his paper would be left empty."

These are the words of Apollodorus; but the old woman who lived with him, as Diocles reports, used to say that he wrote five hundred lines every day. And Hecaton says, that he first applied himself to philosophy, when his patrimony had been confiscated, and seized for the royal treasury.

IV. He was slight in person, as is plain from his statue which is in the Ceramicus, which is nearly hidden by the equestrian statue near it; in reference to which circumstance, Carneades called him Crypsippus.<sup>[102]</sup> He was once reproached by some one for not attending the lectures of Ariston, who was drawing a great crowd after him at the time; and he replied, "If I had attended to the multitude I should not have been a philosopher." And once, when he saw a dialectician pressing hard on Cleanthes, and proposing sophistical fallacies to him, he said, "Cease to drag that old man from more important business, and propose these questions to us who are young." At another time, when some one wishing to ask him something privately, was addressing him quietly, but when he saw a multitude approaching began to speak more energetically he said to him:—

Alas, my brother! now your eye is troubled;  
You were quite sane just now; and yet how quickly  
Have you succumbed to frenzy.<sup>[103]</sup>

[102] From κρύπτω, to hide, and ἵππος, a horse.

## Post by “Don” of April 20, 2023 at 4:09 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Reference to Chrysippus vs Epicurus in writing, and to the statue in the Ceramicus - plus the meaning of Chrysippus' name!

III. He was industrious beyond all other men; as is plain from his writings; for he wrote more than seven hundred and five books. And he often wrote several books on the same subject, wishing to put down everything that occurred to him; and constantly correcting his previous assertions, and using a great abundance of testimonies. So that, as in one of his writings he had quoted very nearly the whole of the Medea of Euripides, and some one had his book in his hands; this latter, when he was asked what he had got there, made answer, “The Medea of Chrysippus.” And Apollodorus, the Athenian, in his Collection of Dogmas, wishing to assert that what Epicurus had written out of his own head, and without any quotations to support his arguments, was a great deal more than all the books of Chrysippus, speaks thus (I give his exact words), “For if any one were to take away from the books of Chrysippus all the passages which he quotes from other authors, his paper would be left empty.”

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[102] From κρύπτω, to hide, and ἵππος, a horse.

That etymology is for the pun on his name: Crypsippus 😊 That's not bad!

(That cryp.. in the pun is the same as the "crypto..." in cryptography etc)

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 24, 2023 at 1:17 PM

Another observation in unraveling this, spurred by our recent discussion of Cyreniacs:

Chrysippus came after Epicurus, but that does not mean that he was responding specifically to Epicurus. Presumably he could have been responding to the earlier Aristippus/Cyreniacs,

against whom his argument is valid, and ignoring Epicurus.

So from Chrysippus' point of view, If the guiding principle of life is the stimulative pleasure the Cyreniacs advocated, and if there are large segments of time when stimulative pleasure is not present at all, then to what are we to look during those times? Who needs or can depend on a guide which is not present?

Not that this really adds anything to the conversation but depending on who is talking to whom Chrysippus could have been entirely pleased and convinced of his own argument if he was for some reason not intending to deal with Epicurus.

And to that extent Chrysippus and Epicurus would have been in agreement: both saw the flaw in the Cyreniac logic, but only Epicurus was motivated to correct it by expanding the definition of pleasure.