

Would You Rather Live For A Week As (1) Epicurus During the Last Week of His Life or (2) An Anonymous Shepherd Laying In The Grass In The Summertime With No Pain At All?

Post by “Cassius” of September 6, 2023 at 2:36 PM

The Poll Question is as stated in the header. Please reply, and state your reasoning, with any cites you think are applicable, in the thread below!

Post by “Godfrey” of September 6, 2023 at 3:00 PM

Which would Epicurus choose?

At this particular moment, despite my poll answer above, I think I'd choose the shepherd. Partly I'm choosing avoidance of pain 😊 . But I'm also considering that learning and growth bring me great joy, and the shepherd is probably closer to my stage of growth, which perhaps would give me the space to enjoy the pleasures of nature and experience the process of growth.

However, the option of Epicurus' final week could serve as a trial run for my own death (not that I anticipate dying in that particular way: more a trial run of the process of dying) and as such could be of value and interest.

Having now answered a hypothetical, I'm turning and running from the rabbit hole as fast as my legs will carry me!

Post by “Cassius” of September 6, 2023 at 3:19 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Which would Epicurus choose?

That is a very good follow on question to help articulate the answer to the first and main question: Would Epicurus himself have traded places for the week that is under discussion?

I think this poll should be very interesting and after we see some commentary and look for fine tuning I am going to put it on the Facebook group!



Post by “Cassius” of September 6, 2023 at 4:04 PM

The quirky option of referring the issue to Siro or Philodemus comes from On Ends Book Two:

[Quote from Cicero - On Ends Book Two](#)

When I had thus spoken, Triarius said, ‘I have friends to whom I can refer these questions, and although I might have made some answer myself, still I would rather look to men better equipped than myself.’ ***‘I believe you mean our friends Siro and Philodemus, not only excellent men, but men of very great learning.*** ‘You understand me rightly,’ said he. ‘Agreed, then,’ said I, ‘but it were fairer that Triarius should give some verdict about our disagreement.’ ‘I reject him on affidavit,’ said Torquatus with a smile, ‘as prejudiced, at all events on this subject, since you handle these topics with some gentleness, while he persecutes us after the fashion of the Stoics.’ Then Triarius remarked: ‘At least I shall do so hereafter with greater confidence. For I shall be ready with the doctrines I have just listened to; though I shall not attack you until I see that you have been primed by the friends you mention.’ This said, we put an end at once to our walk and our debate.

Post by “Joshua” of September 6, 2023 at 6:33 PM

Quote from Henry David Thoreau

The Grecian are youthful and erring and fallen gods, with the vices of men, but in many important respects essentially of the divine race. In my Pantheon, Pan still reigns in his pristine glory, with his ruddy face, his flowing beard, and his shaggy body, his pipe and his crook, his nymph Echo, and his chosen daughter Iambe; for the great god Pan is not

dead, as was rumored. No god ever dies. Perhaps of all the gods of New England and of ancient Greece, I am most constant at his shrine.

It's interesting that while Lucretius records that magnets were so named because they came from Magnesia, Pliny the Elder quotes Nicander of Colophon as suggesting that magnets got their name from a shepherd named Magnes, whose iron studded shoes stuck to the ground on Mount Ida.

Post by “Blank_Emu43” of September 7, 2023 at 4:08 AM

I chose option three.

As a human (like other animals), I do desire to achieve pleasure and to avoid pain. So of course I will choose the option with no pain. However, if I do end up the same way as Epicurus – dying from bladder stones or something else painful – I may choose instead to accept my impending demise knowing that I have lived a good life. If I can remain as cheerful as Epicurus was in his last days, I probably wouldn't think of any other option.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That is a very good follow on question to help articulate the answer to the first and main question: Would Epicurus himself have traded places for the week that is under discussion?

Assuming that in this hypothetical Epicurus avoids his painful death, I would say no but only because it would allow him to prove that he can still be cheerful despite being in pain, setting an example to his followers. His body may have been in immense pain but his mind wasn't as he was able to remember and reflect on his life, his friends, his philosophical discussions, etc., which gave him pleasure. And of course he knew that he wouldn't have been in immense pain for too long (PD4). Not to mention that he also had people who were capable of tending the Garden after he was gone. Preserving his legacy and teachings for generations to come... until Nature decides to bury a lot of it under ash and lava. Maybe building a town near a volcano isn't a good idea?

Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2023 at 5:38 AM

Thanks to all who have answered so far! This is going to provide some great food for thought over at Facebook too. I'll probably wait til the weekend to post it to give more time for consideration.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 7, 2023 at 9:27 AM

It seems that this hypothetical could be made more simple and clear. And there could be multiple ways to do so. For example:

"Would you rather be Epicurus, living in pain on your deathbed surrounded by friends knowing that you have made great contributions toward understanding the nature of the world and helping others understand it as well"

or

"Live your last week on earth pain-free but all alone on a mountain as a shepherd, and then have a very quick death from a sudden heart attack from eating too much sheep cheese, AND leave no legacy."

The original hypothetical as stated in post 1, sheds light on the natural desire for good health (and why so many picked the shepherd), since the wording of the hypothetical was such that the shepherd was not in pain.

We cannot control what kind of death we will have, or if we will be surrounded by friends or die alone. AND this question: How much can we control what kind of legacy we leave, since a portion of that process occurs by chance?

Post by “Don” of September 7, 2023 at 10:33 AM

I was assuming I wasn't dying at the end of the week as a shepherd.

Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2023 at 10:54 AM

Yes actually I do not see the "death at the end of the week" as being a major factor in making the hypothetical work.

The intent is generally that of:

1 - Being Epicurus for a week (with all that that implies) but in pain from kidneystones; vs

2 - Being a random shepherd for a week who is experiencing no specific pain but knows nothing about philosophy and doing nothing in particular but minding his own business living the live of a shepherd in the mountains .

Before posting to Facebook I will probably use these descriptions.

Post by "Cassius" of September 7, 2023 at 10:56 AM

An issue with any hypothetical is trying to exclude all the issues that people with think to add in that are outside the hypothetical. In this case the fact that Epicurus died after his last week needs to be excluded from the terms so that we can focus on the issue of their relative pains and pleasures while alive.

But also as with any hypothetical, explaining the caveats also helps with the main purpose, which is to get people thinking about the overall question.

Post by "Don" of September 7, 2023 at 11:00 AM

Personally, I think being a student of Epicurus for a week, even his last week, is more intriguing than "being" Epicurus himself.

Post by "Cassius" of September 7, 2023 at 11:59 AM

And on the topic of being a student of Epicurus for any time period, here is something I think is related that any student of Epicurus should consider:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3320-would-you-rather-live-for-a-week-as-1-epicurus-during-the-last-week-of-his-life/>

Q: "What is your understanding of Platonic Idealism and Aristotelian Essentialism and how they may or may not relate to Epicurus' view of Pleasure? Does considering that relationship (if any) indicate anything as to how you would answer the question being posed?"

Post by “Eikadistes” of September 7, 2023 at 12:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And on the topic of being a student of Epicurus for any time period, here is something I think is related that any student of Epicurus should consider:

Q: "What is your understanding of Platonic Idealism and Aristotelian Essentialism and how they may or may not relate to Epicurus' view of Pleasure? Does considering that relationship (if any) indicate anything as to how you would answer the question being posed?"

Agreed. Unlike so many Christians, whose understanding of their Savior and the depth of their knowledge of the Christian tradition is self-mistaken for a projection of individual wants and desires and fears based on nothing but their own, personal experiences, and limited educations related to religious history and comparative philosophy, it should be important for us to not believe that we think we understand Epicurus, and mold our understanding to the needs of our own lives, but rather to make a commitment to understand the texts as they are, not as we are.

And then, when teaching new students, we simplify the teachings to a genuinely accurate (though incomplete) summary.

Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2023 at 1:28 PM

Agreed Nate.

So how would a non-idealist non-essentialist person like Epicurus view discussions where "Pleasure" is compared from one person to another or at different times and places?

Is there a standard of "pleasure" that exists for everyone that allows an explicit one-to-one comparison?

We have heard many times that accepting "Pleasure" as a standard turns us into cows (or worse)?

If that is not the case, why is it not the case?

Or are we in fact aiming at exactly the same pleasure of a cow grazing in the grass?

Is one person's "height of pleasure" the same as another person's?

Post by “Don” of September 7, 2023 at 1:29 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Personally, I think being a student of Epicurus for a week, even his last week, is more intriguing than "being" Epicurus himself.

Which leads me to ask if a more difficult question would be:

You can travel back in time for one week (and you're able to understand and read the language, have all the proper inoculations, etc.) for a specifically Epicurean excursion. When and where do you go?

Do you spend a week:

- sitting with Epicurus as a child, badgering his teachers about the origins of Chaos
- learning with Epicurus in Lampsacus at the beginning of his philosophical work
- traveling with Epicurus when he was getting kicked out of Mytilene
- being with Epicurus during the last week of his life
- in Athens meeting with Cicero and Atticus and visiting the Garden, Academy, etc.
- visiting the Villa of the Papyri, reading in the library, and attending a 20th with Philodemus and Piso

PS. I'm intentionally leaving out spending a week living in the Garden and house with Epicurus in his prime, in the mature school surrounded by students. That'd be the easy choice for me.

Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2023 at 1:32 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3320-would-you-rather-live-for-a-week-as-1-epicurus-during-the-last-week-of-his-life/>

For me that one is easier I think - I would want to be able to question Epicurus in his most mature and advanced stage of life, so I would say "being with Epicurus during the last week of his life" to ask him where he eventually came down on many of these same issues we are discussing.

And i would probably include the exact question we are discussing from post one of this thread.

Post by “Don” of September 7, 2023 at 1:36 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

For me that one is easier I think - I would want to be able to question Epicurus in his most mature and advanced stage of life, so I would say "being with Epicurus during the last week of his life" to ask him where he eventually came down on many of these same issues we are discussing.

And i would probably include the exact question we are discussing from post one of this thread.

Ah! But how readily available would he be available that last week? How open to questions? How bedridden and in pain would be be? How much wine was he drinking to dull the pain? I can come up with all kinds of complications! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2023 at 1:37 PM

An interesting aspect of Don's question is that it points out to me that it is more important to know "the truth" of what Epicurus was talking about than to think that I already know what the "most pleasant" of those alternative weeks would be.

I do not think that I (speaking only for me) have an adequate grasp of what Epicurus was really advising to presume that 'it would be more fun to be with Epicurus in the good times' is the right answer.

It might be more "fun" or even 'pleasant" to be with him in some of the earlier times, but i would want to know his mature thoughts or else i would not be so sure I had made the correct choice.

Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2023 at 1:39 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I can come up with all kinds of complications! 😊

I knew the Don we all know and love as to hypotheticals would not be long in coming! 😊

Post by “Don” of September 7, 2023 at 10:57 PM

If I may:

I'm trying to understand what long term pleasure I would be gaining if I chose to endure the pain of the last week of Epicurus's life. We know (or are told) he was writing letters up to his last day, or at least dictating them. But I've seen people go through kidney stones, and Epicurus's were evidently impacted and infected.

Plus do I die at the end of the week or come back to my present self? Do I get to retain all of Epicurus's knowledge? Do I get to come back and write books in Epicurus's name?

Epicureans can choose to undergo pain and hardship of it leads to long term pleasure in their lives. If I can somehow know what he knew, that's something to consider. But again, I remain skeptical of the value of these kinds of thought experiments.

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2023 at 3:14 AM

Is not judging pleasure by length of time specifically denied to be a good idea by Epicurus?

Letter to Menoecus:

"And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant."

As for the hypo I will specify for the Facebook version that "for a week" means that you only have one week to live in either scenario at the end of which your life is over. That makes it easier to see that the choice involves "how does one spend the time that one has."

The alternative of "for a week" meaning the equivalent of a trip to the beach after which you return to your present self might also be useful as a warmup to consider first, but would not frame the question so starkly.

And of course in life we have a lot more choices than these two to choose from, just as we have many pleasures to choose from, but the point of a hypothetical is to focus on a key issue for purposes of understanding a deeper lesson.

In this case: Are all pleasures equally to be chosen? If so, how do we choose among them? If not, why not?

Simply saying "Choose pleasure and avoid pain, while sometimee choosing pain to avoid a worse pain or get greater pleasure" answers that question generally, but is that all there is to be said about the nature of the choice of pleasure to seek? If that is all that can be said philosophically then that itself is important to know. If we think Epicurus said more, what else as a key philosophical rule that would apply here?

Another warmup question might be: "A former Torquatus put his son to death for violating a military rule, and our Torquatus justified that as a decision consistent in nature with an Epicurean perspective. This despite the other Epicurean rule that we sometimes die for a friend. Does that tell us anything about the Epicurean position for choosing among pleasures and pains?"

Post by "Don" of September 8, 2023 at 6:03 AM

Now we're getting somewhere!

Your Menoikeus quote is an interesting one. I went back to see how I translated it:

Quote from Menoikeus, Don translation

Just as the most food is not chosen but that which brings the greatest pleasure; choose as well not the longest time but that in which one enjoys the fruits of that which bring the greatest pleasure (ἀλλὰ τὸν ἥδιστον καρπίζεται).

The key word that gets skimmed over by a lot of translations is καρπίζεται (karpizetai) "enjoy the fruits (of that which brings the greatest pleasure (ἡδίστον hēdiston))" which is related to Latin carpo as in carpe diem "pluck/harvest the day". There's a literal sense of reaping the benefits, enjoying the fruits, of the most pleasurable experience, the sweetest choice.

By consciously choosing the hypothetical - for me! someone else's mileage may vary - that involves living in severe pain for a week then dying, whether or not I'm imbued with the knowledge of Epicurus or surrounded by his friends, doesn't sound "fruitful" to me, to riff on καρπίζεται. One, by definition of the hypothetical, couldn't "come back" and share that knowledge. But do I know I'm me living as Epicurus, or am I just Epicurus living his life with no memory of me?

This seems akin to the choice of "Would you choose to be given "god-like" knowledge for a day then die?" What good would it serve to know everything and not be able to share it?

Epicurus didn't choose to experience the severe pains of his final acute illness. That was a part of his life that wasn't up to him. How he dealt with it is admirable, maybe even inspirational. So I don't see the fruitfulness in choosing that final week. It's still the shepherd for me if I am required to choose.

Post by “Don” of September 8, 2023 at 6:36 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

In this case: Are all pleasures equally to be chosen? If so, how do we choose among them? If not, why not?

No.

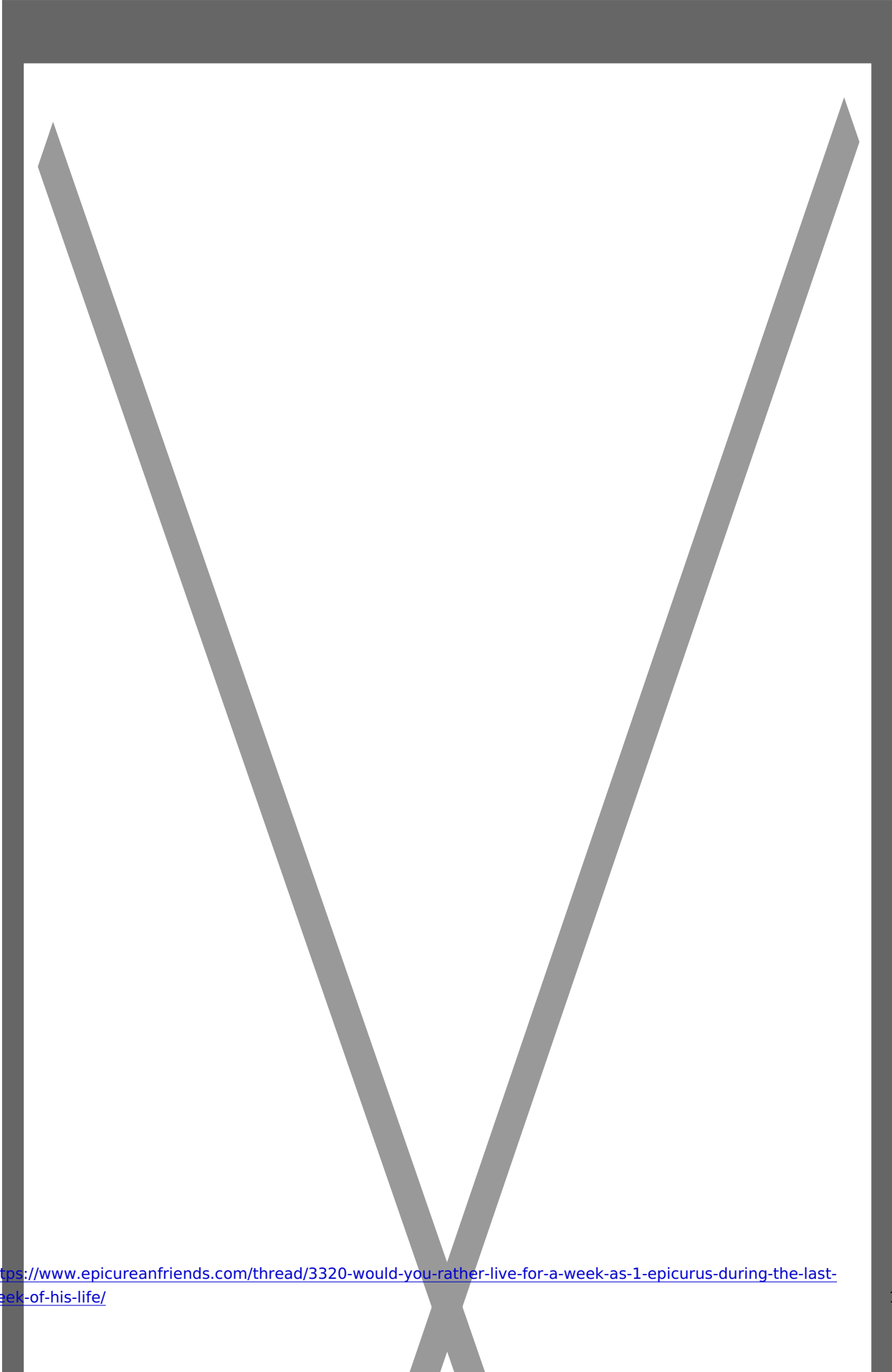
Epicurus was concerned with our entire existence: the well-being of both our physical (σώματος) and mental (ψυχῆς) health. By contemplating and following his philosophy, we come to understand that all our decisions of which actions to choose and from which actions to flee are going to affect whether our physical, material health and well-being are to be maintained or not and whether our minds are to be troubled or not. That is the baseline for every decision and with "Ask this question of every desire: what will happen to me if the object of desire is achieved, and what if not?"

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Another warmup question might be: "A former Torquatus put his son to death for violating a military rule, and our Torquatus justified that as a decision consistent in nature with an Epicurean perspective. This despite the other Epicurean rule that we sometimes die for a friend. Does that tell us anything about the Epicurean position for choosing among pleasures and pains?"

For the earlier Torquatus, he decided security and order in his troops was more important than the life of his son. That sounds horrific, but I'm also not an ancient Roman general commanding a legion. The fruits of his decision were strict discipline under his command. Was it worth it? Did it provide well-being? You'd have to ask Titus Manlius Imperiosus Torquatus

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3320-would-you-rather-live-for-a-week-as-1-epicurus-during-the-last-week-of-his-life/>

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2023 at 6:36 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

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[Quote from Don](#)

What good would it serve to know everything and not be able to share it?

Yes we are making progress!

So if I read you correctly, from your perspective, the "ability to share" seems to be perhaps the paramount consideration in fruitfulness and enjoyability.

As you indicate (... "for me! someone else's mileage may vary"...) that may be a personal choice, but it's clearly understandable, and definitely advances the conversation to suggest something as a criteria.

One would then have to contemplate "sharing" as a companion to "length of time" in consideration of pleasure.

(we crossposted and I had not seen post 24 before writing that)

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2023 at 6:39 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

That sounds horrific, but I'm also not an ancient Roman general commanding a legion. The fruits of his decision were strict discipline under his command. Was it worth it? Did it provide well-being? You'd have to ask Titus Manlius Imperiosus Torquatus

The presumption there seems to be that the choice of greatest pleasure is entirely personal. For the present rather than agree or disagree I would just say that --- if true --- that too (in addition to "sharing" and "length of time") would be major factors to consider in this hypothetical.

Post by “Don” of September 8, 2023 at 7:12 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So if I read you correctly, from your perspective, the "ability to share" seems to be perhaps the paramount consideration in fruitfulness and enjoyability.

Hmmm. That said, I can take pleasure in learning something new and I don't necessarily have to share everything I learn. The differences with this Epicurus week scenario is:

Would I know I know something that wasn't available to me or my Epicurean friends in modern time? Or am I simply transported into Epicurus's body with no prior knowledge of my previous existence? If the latter, I'm not worried about sharing. In the former, I'm dealing with having important knowledge that could be of use to my friends with the pain of not being able to share that knowledge with said friends.

PS. (Edit) Everything is contextual! The same pleasure in different contexts coming from different desires may lead to completely different decisions on whether one selects or flees from that pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2023 at 8:09 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

PS. (Edit) Everything is contextual! The same pleasure in different contexts coming from different desires may lead to completely different decisions on whether one selects or flees from that pleasure.

So "pleasure" is itself contextual and there is absolutely no Platonic ideal or Aristotelian essence of "Pleasure"?

Post by “Don” of September 8, 2023 at 8:27 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So "pleasure" is itself contextual and there is absolutely no Platonic ideal or Aristotelian essence of "Pleasure"?

The feeling of pleasure is personal and subjective.

Choices are based on context.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 8, 2023 at 9:22 AM

Is this chart of any use?

[A Comparison Chart on “The Goal of Life” – NewEpicurean](#)

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2023 at 10:24 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

The feeling of pleasure is personal and subjective.

So "the height of pleasure" or "the highest pleasure" or "the greatest pleasure" or similar terms can never be measured on an absolute scale or even compared from person to person based on any outside authority or measurement, but are terms that are always relative to the person under discussion at a particular moment?

Does that apply too to "the limit of quantity of pleasure" as referenced in [PD03](#)? If so, the [PD03](#) is intended to mean the "limit of quantity of pleasure for YOU" or "for a particular person" is the absence of pain, rather than referring to a particular activity? And that therefore different people are going to be doing different things when they are at this limit referenced in [PD03](#)?

If these are correct, then the shepherd out with the flock might be at his or her height of pleasure while Epicurus with his school could be at his height of pleasure and be doing

absolutely different things, and therefore:

- It makes no sense to try to define any particular activity or state as the "height of pleasure" for people in general?

- The choice to live as a shepherd for your final week or Epicurus at the end for your final week says everything about your personal preference but nothing that can be generally praised or condemned by any general rule ... purely a personal preference?

{ I am not asking these totally rhetorically and if Don or anyone else disagrees with the perspective please say so! }

Post by "Don" of September 8, 2023 at 10:33 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Does that apply too to "the limit of quantity of pleasure" as referenced in [PD03](#)? If so, the [PD03](#) is intended to mean the "limit of quantity of pleasure for YOU" or "for a particular person" is the absence of pain, rather than referring to a particular activity? And that therefore different people are going to be doing different things when they are at this limit referenced in [PD03](#)?

No.

The "limit" of pleasure is the removal of all pain, by definition. After that, it's all variation. For anyone. People are going to be doing different things to provide that variety.

Post by "Don" of September 8, 2023 at 10:37 AM

Don't get "the height of pleasure" or "the highest pleasure" or "the greatest pleasure" mixed up with the "greatest good." The greatest good, summum bonum, telos *is* pleasure. But I don't want to derail this thread, but I want to stress that point.

Post by "Godfrey" of September 8, 2023 at 10:51 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3320-would-you-rather-live-for-a-week-as-1-epicurus-during-the-last-week-of-his-life/>

Does this sometimes perplexing PD add anything to this discussion?

[PD09](#) *"If every pleasure were condensed and were present, both in time and in the whole compound [body and soul] or in the most important parts of our nature, then pleasures would never differ from one another."* Inwood & Gerson (1994)

Post by "Don" of September 8, 2023 at 12:29 PM

I've often interpreted [PD09](#) to mean that a pleasurable feeling is a pleasurable feeling. Condensing all or every pleasure implies that's possible... Or does it? That "if" could be doing the same work as in [PD10](#). IF x was possible, then y. But IF x isn't possible, y isn't possible. Maybe [PD09](#) is actually saying that all pleasures do differ from each other!

[PD09](#), 10, and 11 all start out with $\epsilon\iota$ "if..."

- If every pleasure were condensed...
- If the things that produce the delights of those who are profligate...
- If our suspicions about astronomical phenomena and about death were nothing to us...

Those "if's..." imply to me that those IF's are counterfactual! Those if's are not actually possible. That sets to a whole different vibe for each of those 3 PDs.

Post by "Cassius" of September 8, 2023 at 12:44 PM

Other than [PD09](#) does Epicurus say anything anywhere that might support the idea that pleasures are "the same"? I am not thinking that he does and so I wonder if that is not also intended to reference "Quantity" as in [PD03](#).

Other than in quantity I cannot see much similarity in pleasures as a whole other than that the feeling of pleasure tells us it is pleasurable, which is more of a generalization than a statement of a specific feeling.

Times like this I doubt that Epicurus put together this list and ordering himself.

Post by “Don” of September 8, 2023 at 12:55 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Other than [PD09](#) does Epicurus say anything anywhere that might support the idea that pleasures are "the same"?

See my addendum edit to post 35. I'm not convinced [PD09](#) says pleasures are the same.

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2023 at 1:45 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

See my addendum edit to post 35. I'm not convinced [PD09](#) says pleasures are the same.

Right - I intended my comment to mean that I was agreeing with you, and I was just looking for more support against the opposite position. It doesn't make sense to me that someone would hold different types of pleasures (taste, smell) to be the same except from certain limited perspectives. One might say that they "are all the same in that they feel pleasurable" but that approaches being very high level wordplay that is of limited usefulness. One could also talk about the "quantity" (I think) in terms of coming up with a general measurement of "intensity" or "amount of attention you pay to that feeling" but the benefit of that too would be pretty limited.

So I agree with you that [PD09](#) doesn't imply that all pleasures are the same except (at most) from some very high level perspective. Pleasures can differ very significantly from one another, and the question that each of us faces is WHICH pleasure to pursue at a particular moment.

Post by “Plantpierogi” of September 8, 2023 at 6:12 PM

There's no doubt that Epicurus was in an immense amount of pain during the last week of his life, and as illogical as it may sound, I would trade a lifetime of grass-laying shepherd days to experience what it must have been like for him during that time. Something so priceless as to

be able to write to my most trusted friends and reflect on a lifetime of philosophical discussions is my ideal way to spend my final days. No greater pleasure exists for me. And to be able to do that through his eyes and his mind, given all that he has accomplished along with countless philosophical discussions? That isn't something that can so easily be recreated.

If I wanted to be a lay in the grass in the summertime for a week, I would simply wait 9 months. Besides, a shepherd's life never appealed to me, anyway.

In The Letter to Idomeneus, he writes:

[Quote from Cyril Bailey from his book "Epicurus, The Extant Remains."](#)

"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."

I could not imagine a more pleasant end.

(besides *not* suffering from strangury and dysentery, of course. Details)

Post by "Cassius" of September 8, 2023 at 7:34 PM

[Quote from Plantpierogi](#)

If I wanted to be a lay in the grass in the summertime for a week, I would simply wait 9 months. Besides, a shepherd's life never appealed to me, anyway.

Great thoughts in that post Plantpierogi and good to see back you on the forum again!

Post by "Onenski" of September 8, 2023 at 8:35 PM

The hypothetical scenario reminded me a quote by John Stuart Mill that probably you know: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."

For Mill there are special pleasures, like reading philosophy, listening to music, contemplate art, etc., that are superior to other pleasures (accessible only for animals). I understand his idea, but I reject it for similar reasons why I reject stoicism: I don't think there are intrinsically nobler people, nobler activities or nobler ways to live (or intrinsically pleasurable).

I do think there are standards to evaluate pleasures and pains among people but they're not necessary, but contingent. (After all, we are human beings, of course we share pleasures and we share the absence of pain as a goal to achieve.) Cassius, I think you won't find an activity that brings pleasure in all contexts: human nature it's not about immovable truths but about change.

Finally, I know the Letter to Idemoneus is beautiful and inspiring, but I really doubt Epicurus was really having pleasure in the previous moments of his death. So, if I had to give an answer, I'd prefer to live like the shepherd, but better I prefer to be me, in this place and this time. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of September 8, 2023 at 9:04 PM

[Quote from Onenski](#)

For Mill there are special pleasures, like reading philosophy, listening to music, contemplate art, etc., that are superior to other pleasures (accessible only for animals). I understand his idea, but I reject it for similar reasons why I reject stoicism: I don't think there are intrinsically nobler people, nobler activities or nobler ways to live (or intrinsically pleasurable).

I think most Epicureans would probably agree that there are no "nobler" people, activities, or ways to live, if "nobler" implies an absolute ranking of value. But would Epicureans agree that there are no "preferable" people, activities, or ways to live, that we we ourselves can decide to be preferable? The word "special" in Mill's wording is a little ambiguous reading it from your excerpt, but once we read out the "absolute for everyone standard," can we not - and should we not - establish for ourselves which are better and pursue those?

Is the entire question one of absolute vs subjective definition of the scale?

Post by “Onenski” of September 8, 2023 at 10:05 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But would Epicureans agree that there are no "preferable" people, activities, or ways to live, that we we ourselves can decide to be preferable?

I'll try to answer. Have you considered that maybe the "what" is less important than the "how"? I mean, possibly there's not a specific and universal activity or object to pursue that brings pleasure in general, but there's a way to do it or to get it: the virtuous one.

So far as we know, the virtuous life is the best way to live a pleasurable life: prudently, safely, friendly, painlessly, etc. Virtue is sensible to context: it tells that you'll get a lot of pleasure with food *if you're hungry*, that you'll get pleasure with water *if you're thirsty*, that you'll enjoy a videogame *if you're bored*, or that you'll enjoy reading a book *if you're in the mood to do it*.

Not everybody enjoys the same things evidently, but it's also true that not everyone is in the same circumstances or have the same background.

Maybe you will think that my answer is circular, because virtue is the instrument to maximize pleasure. So when I recommend a virtuous way to live I'm just saying that a pleasurable life is that with pleasure. My point is that Epicurus recommended a life with prudence, and I think now I understand why it's the source of pleasure: prudence indicates how you can maximize the pleasure (reduce pain) with any activity (even if you're in bed with kidney stones).

So my answer is: possibly that thing that can bring pleasure to everyone, no matter their context, age, education, etc., is virtue (specially prudence). A shepherd without prudence will waste his resources and time. The good news is that we don't need to be Epicurus, or Socrates, in order to have prudence. 😄

I really hope this answer have some sense, because I'm not sure if I understood completely the question in dispute. 😄

Post by "Cassius" of September 8, 2023 at 10:35 PM

[Quote from Onenski](#)

I mean, possibly there's not a specific and universal activity or object to pursue that brings pleasure in general, but there's a way to do it or to get it: the virtuous one.

I think most all of us will agree on that. Even eating ice cream is not guaranteed pleasureable, if you have just eaten a gallon and are stuffed.

[Quote from Onenski](#)

I really hope this answer have some sense, because I'm not sure if I understood completely the question in dispute.

I think the question is more addressed to this: "Are all pleasures really interchangeable to a person, or or some pleasures more to be chosen than others?" Maybe the answer is obviously "Yes, some are to be chosen before others," but what is the best way to explain that to yourself, or to (for example) your child.

Cicero and others seem to infer that all true Epicureans will choose to spend their lives laying on the beach without a thought to (for example) a life as an artist or a scientist or a policeman or fireman.

Is Cicero correct? If not, why not, and how do you explain the Epicurean analysis of choosing some pleasures over others in Epicurean terms without reference to nobility or other outside standards? Is the only thing that can be said is "choose the most pleasant?"

Post by "Onenski" of September 8, 2023 at 10:45 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Cicero and others seem to infer that all true Epicureans will choose to spend their lives laying on the beach without a thought to (for example) a life as an artist or a scientist or a policeman or fireman.

What's his argument?

[Quote from Cassius](#)

how do you explain the Epicurean analysis of choosing some pleasures over others in Epicurean terms without reference to nobility or other outside standards?

Which possible epicurean standards (or procedure) do you have in mind?

Are you looking for a foundation or justification of the standard(s) in question?

Post by "Cassius" of September 8, 2023 at 11:18 PM

As to Cicero's reasoning, here are some relevant references:

Cicero, Fin. 2.109

Quare aliud aliquod, Torquate, hominis summum bonum reperiendum est, voluptatem bestiis concedamus.

Therefore, Torquatus, some other supreme good must be found for a human being. Let us leave pleasure to the nonhuman animals.

T2 Cicero, Fin. 2.111

Nec tamen ullo modo summum pecudis bonum et hominis idem mihi videri potest.

I cannot in any way think that humans and livestock have the same supreme good.

T3 Aristotle, EN I .5 I 095b19-20 (Cf. Heraclitus fr. 4 and 29, and Plato, flej?_. 586a-b)

oi piv oov 110XX01 TIONTEXCOc Co.IOpomoOthbEtc tpocivorrat 1300"Kilp&TWV rov irpooupoOpEvot...

Most entirely slavish people clearly choose the life of cattle...

Cicero, Fin. 2.40

Animality Hi non viderunt, ut ad cursum equum, ad arandum bovem, ad indagandum canem, sic hominem

Objection ad duos res, ut ait Aristoteles, ad intellegendum et <ad> agendum esse natum quasi mortalem

deum, controque ut tardam aliquam et languidam pecudem ad pastum et ad procreandi voluptatem hoc divinum animal ortum esse voluerunt, quo nihil mihi videtur absurdus.

They [viz., Aristippus and the Cyrenaics] did not see that just as a horse is born for running, an ox for ploughing, and a dog for hunting, so a human is born for two things, as Aristotle says, for thinking and for acting, as if a mortal god. They, by contrast, wanted this

divine animal to be born for grazing and the pleasure of procreating, like a slow and lazy sheep. Nothing seems to me more absurd than this.

Cicero, Fin. 2.110-111

Et homini, qui ceteris animantibus plurimum proestot, praecipui a nature nihil datum esse dicemus? Nos vero, si quidem in voluptate sunt omnia, lenge multumque superomur a bestiis, quibus ipso terra Pundit ex sese pastus varies atque abundantes nihil laborantibus, nobis autem out vix out ne vix quidem suppetunt multo labore quaerentibus. Nec tamen ullo modo summum pecudis bonum et hominis idem mihi videri potest.

Shall we say that the human being, which far surpasses other living things, has been endowed by nature with no preferred thing? In truth, if everything is in pleasure, then we are far and away surpassed by the nonhuman animals, for whom the earth itself pours out various and abundant provisions, with no work on their part, whereas we are able to supply our wants scarcely or not at all, and with great difficulty. However, I cannot in any way think that humans and livestock have the same supreme good.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 9, 2023 at 3:54 AM

Sorry, I'm playing catch-up.... Referring to [PD09](#), I'm reading that the variables that cause pleasures to differ are intensity, duration and extent (parts of the body and aspects of the mind). If this is the case, then intensity, duration and extent can be considered useful ways to evaluate potential pleasures. This is of course in the context of what each particular individual considers pleasurable in a given situation.

Which is interesting, because the duration part of this seems to conflict with these PDs:

[PD19](#). *Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of joy, if its limits are measured out through reasoning.*

[PD20](#). *The flesh assumes that the limits of joy are infinite, and that infinite joy can be produced only through infinite time. But the mind, thinking through the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life and therefore has no need of*

infinite time; yet the mind does not flee from joy, nor when events cause it to exit from life does it look back as if it has missed any aspect of the best life.

Measuring it out through reasoning (if you will), it seems that [PD19](#) & 20 are comparing finite and infinite time, whereas [PD09](#) is dealing strictly with finite time and therefore there's no conflict between these.

With this in mind you can evaluate hypothetical #1(Epicurus) and #2 (shepherd) like this:

- intensity: #1, intense pain, intense pleasure; intensity of pleasure outweighs pain by uncertain amount. #2, uncertain pain, uncertain pleasure; uncertain which predominates and by how much.

- duration: #1, one week. #2, one week.

- extent: #1, great breadth of mental pleasure, somewhat localized physical pain. #2, uncertain breadth of mental pleasure, uncertain physical pleasure and pain.

So to properly evaluate this hypothetical you need to get a sense of the uncertainties. We have Epicurus' letter describing his situation, but we don't know much about the shepherd. Do they love or hate their job? Are they allergic to grass? What's the breadth of their mental pleasure in this circumstance: does it align with their innermost desires? We therefore need to make up answers for all of these uncertainties, which of course is what makes this a hypothetical in the first place 😞

Post by “Don” of September 9, 2023 at 6:01 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

So to properly evaluate this hypothetical you need to get a sense of the uncertainties. We have Epicurus' letter describing his situation, but we don't know much about the shepherd. Do they love or hate their job? Are they allergic to grass? What's the breadth of their mental pleasure in this circumstance: does it align with their innermost desires? We therefore need to make up answers for all of these uncertainties, which of course is what makes this a hypothetical in the first place 😞

It warms my heart to see someone else want more details on a hypothetical 😊 and these are ones I hadn't even thought of! Well done, [Godfrey](#) !!

Post by “Don” of September 9, 2023 at 6:18 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

[PD19](#). Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of joy, if its limits are measured out through reasoning.

To be clear, where Saint-Andre uses "joy" the Greek is *hēdonē* "pleasure." My take on that PD is that if the definition of the limit of pleasure is the removal of all pain (and after that it's just variety) it doesn't matter the amount of time, finite or infinite. If your pleasure glass is full, it's full.

But I always go back to this commentary from Diogenes Laertius when talking about Epicurus's take on *eudaimonia*:

Quote from Diogenes Laertius, 10.121

[121] Two sorts of happiness (*eudaimonia*) can be conceived, the one the highest possible, such as the gods enjoy, which cannot be augmented, the other admitting addition and subtraction of pleasures.

It's always tricky when trying to compare what texts mean when different words are used: pleasure vs happiness. 121 doesn't say two kinds of pleasure but two kinds of well-being. I do NOT think we could substitute well-being for pleasure in [PD19](#), but does verse 121 inform, in any way, our understanding of the PDs? Questions beget questions.

Post by “Cassius” of September 9, 2023 at 9:33 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

It's always tricky when trying to compare what texts mean when different words are used: pleasure vs happiness.

Tricky and a major hazard. Understandably, people at different levels of perspective on Epicurus tend to use the word that they "think" should fit best, and that breaks the chain of accuracy.

Optimum is to learn the Greek like Don or the Latin, but that's not going to happen for most people. Over time I'd like to see us able to access the line-by-line Greek much more easily, because then we can at least be aware of word switches so as a person has the time they can dig deeper. As it is, without easy access to compare the Greek word when reading a translation, you're flying blind with the translators.

That's a major benefit of the epicurism.info format for the key texts:



I'd like to see our format in the "Texts" section here at Epicureanfriends become more like that in the future.

Post by “Eikadistes” of September 9, 2023 at 9:47 AM

Given that Epicurus died of gallstones (and given that my wife and I recently learned that passing gallstones carries the risk of tearing the bile duct of your pancreas, leading to jaundice, sepsis, necrosis, organ failure, and death), I have to believe that the last week of Epicurus was largely spent managing excruciating pain, and, knowing that organ pain is comparable to childbirth, or getting shot, and knowing that even mild opiates barely manage organ pain, and that there is an entire medical discipline devoted to pain management, there is absolutely no way that my soul would entertain spending a week in a dying body suffering from organ failure. It is categorically excruciating, and while his *Epistle To Idomeneus* may be inspiring, I am convinced that dying of complications from stones is utterly horrific.

(I also have a new perspective and respect for his students: watching someone go through that is traumatic).

The anonymous shepherd may not have developed the same intellectual tools that would allow him to compose a beautiful reflection during the peak of pain due to a medically-remarkable illness, but the diversity of his pleasure is so much greater than Epicurus', I have to go with the shepherd. Epicurus may have enjoyed the maximum amount of pleasure that was available to him, which might have meant some relief through alcohol (though I have my doubts, knowing how much worse my wife would have been if she had been a drinker), a warm bath, and calm faces, but the shepherd is not physically immobile, nor is he forced to face the threat of immanent death. Perhaps if Epicurus had a bad heart and died in his sleep, but ... gallstones? *Absolutely not*. His physical condition was too dangerous.

Post by “Don” of September 9, 2023 at 9:54 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I'd like to see our format in the "Texts" section here at Epicureanfriends become more like that in the future

The Perseus Digital Library doesn't have interlinear texts, but their ability to click on every word to access the authoritative dictionaries is priceless.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 9, 2023 at 11:03 AM

At least to my current thinking, the important point in PDs 19 & 20 is limits: finite (limited) v infinite (unlimited). The limits apply to pleasure, well-being and desires equally. Adding the idea of limits to the idea that the three listed criteria of pleasure in [PD09](#) makes the point, I think, that within our finite lifetimes we can maximize our pleasure by maximizing intensity, duration and breadth. But we should realize that we can never cross the limit into the infinite. There's no afterlife: make the most of this life and keep in mind the fact that it's going to end.

Post by “Don” of September 9, 2023 at 11:57 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

intensity, duration and breadth

You mentioned that these are listed somewhere. To which text or PD were you referring? Sorry, I'm missing the reference.

Post by “Cassius” of September 9, 2023 at 1:19 PM

The "die" has been cast into the river of Facebook:

Cassius Amicus
Admin Top contributor · Just now · 🌐

Hypothetical Question: You have one week to live and two choices about how to spend that time, which you will spend in 300 BC. Would You Rather Live For A Week in 300 BC as: (A) Epicurus During the Last Week of His Life, or (B) An Uneducated Shepherd Laying In The Grass In The Summertime With No Pain At All? Presumptions: (1) Epicurus was in sharp pain but otherwise in control of his faculties. (2) You will actually "be" that person and know what that person knows and feel what that person feels. (3) At the end of the week you will be dead no matter which choice you make.

- I would rather live for that week as Epicurus. 0% > ✕
- I would rather live for that week as the Uneducated. Shepherd 0% > ✕
- What a ridiculous question! Of course I would rather live for that week as the Shepherd in no pain because that's the height of pleasure! 0% > ✕
- What a ridiculous question! Of course I would rather live for that week with the joy Epicurus had even in his last sickly week! 0% > ✕
- I'm not sure and maybe you should ask Philodemus or Siro. 0% > ✕
- I don't answer hypotheticals! 0% > ✕

Add poll option...

I see for the literate among us I should have written " [Alea iacta est](#)"

Post by “Don” of September 9, 2023 at 2:34 PM

I still have problems with the assumption of the "uneducated" shepherd. It makes them sound ignorant. They may not be formally educated, but that doesn't mean they weren't knowledgeable about their craft. Plus, shepherds I wouldn't think were just lying around on the grass for weeks at a time. They needed to tend the flocks, take care of the sheep giving birth in that season, shear the flocks or butcher the animals depending on what they were raising the sheep for, etc. The Romantic notion of blissfully piping away the hours, lounging with a wineskin, seems to ignore a broad swath of what it actually meant to be shepherd... Plus the uncertainty of enough to eat hung over the heads of everyone.

Just providing my little black cloud to hang over the hypothetical.

Post by “Cassius” of September 9, 2023 at 2:46 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I still have problems with the assumption of the "uneducated" shepherd. It makes them sound ignorant. They may not be formally educated, but that doesn't mean they weren't knowledgeable about their craft.

But is he knowledgeable about philosophy? Can someone be happy without philosophy? Is happiness also relative? As the saying goes, "If ignorance is bliss is the shepherd living in a constant state of ecstasy?"

Quote

Wherefore both when young and old a man must study philosophy, that as he grows old he may be young in blessings through the grateful recollection of what has been, and that in youth he may be old as well, since he will know no fear of what is to come. We must then meditate on the things that make our happiness, seeing that when that is with us we have all, but when it is absent we do all to win it.

Quote

[PD12](#). A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe, but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that, without natural science, it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed.

Post by “Don” of September 9, 2023 at 3:00 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But is he knowledgeable about philosophy? Can someone be happy without philosophy? Is happiness also relative? As the saying goes, "If ignorance is bliss is the shepherd living in a constant state of ecstasy?"

I'll give you that, but I also find it interesting how many people in this forum have said that they were attracted to Epicurean philosophy because it resonated with what they were already thinking. Epicurus's philosophy has a lot of common sense and personal responsibility aspects to it. Plus, we're supposed to be modeling nature. The shepherd in the field is closer to nature than someone living in Athens. Granted, they may still be trying to propitiate the gods for good weather, crops, safe births, etc. but "it is better to follow the stories of the gods than to be enslaved by the deterministic decrees of the old natural philosophers."

What does it mean to "practice" philosophy? To me, it means to love wisdom, to practice wise living, to ponder questions to which answers may not be immediately available. Epicurus gives us a wonderful framework within which to study those questions and live that life, but it's up to us to live, study, question, seek answers, and love and practice wisdom. Could the shepherd step onto the path of wisdom on the own? Sure. Is it helpful to find a community and a framework to go further in the path? Undoubtedly! But let's not denigrate the shepherd's natural innate potential.

Post by “Pacatus” of September 9, 2023 at 3:49 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But is he knowledgeable about philosophy? Can someone be happy without philosophy? Is happiness also relative? As the saying goes, "If ignorance is bliss is the shepherd living in a constant state of ecstasy?"

Depends on how one thinks of philosophy: as an intellectual pursuit (at whatever level), or a required body of knowledge (e.g. the Canon) – or as a way of living one’s daily life. If the latter, I see no reason why the shepherd – or myself, with less desire to pursue the intellectual stream and a greater desire (at my age) to live each day as well as can be (pleasure and pleasantness)

- cannot live an Epicurean life. (Of course, I have been helped much by the philosophical knowledge that is represented here!)

So, I'll take the hypothetical as given (applying my own imagination to the question) and choose the shepherd (also for the reasons that @Nate gave).

Stepping outside the hypothetical, I'll choose my own life (with all its vagaries, struggles, errors and even regrets). And be grateful to Epicurus - and friends here - for the insights that help me along.

Post by "Godfrey" of September 10, 2023 at 4:19 AM

[Don](#) intensity, duration and breadth are how I'm reading [PD09](#) at the moment. Epicurus seems to be saying that all pleasures are equal if these three things are equal. I'm interpreting this as saying if you want to analyze pleasures or maximize pleasure, these are the aspects that you have to work with, in the context of a specific situation (yours, or a hypothetical one).

Post by "Don" of September 10, 2023 at 5:25 AM

In going back to @Nate 's compilation and looking at the [Greek construction of the "if" clauses](#), I think Hicks gives the proper paraphrase:

Quote from Hicks, PD09 (emphasis added)

9. If all pleasure had been capable of accumulation,--if this had gone on not only by recurrence in time, but all over the frame or, at any rate, over the principal parts of man's nature, there would never have been any difference between one pleasure and another, as in fact there is.

It seems to me (check my Greek, please!) that the specific construction of [PD09](#) falls under the unreal present as defined in that Wikipedia article and elsewhere:

Present unreal conditions

Unreal (counterfactual) conditions referring to present time are made with εἰ (ei) followed by the imperfect indicative in the protasis, and the imperfect indicative combined with the particle

ἄν (án) in the apodosis

[142] [ιχ.] Εἰ κατεπυκνοῦτο πᾶσα ἡδονή, καὶ χρόνῳ καὶ περὶ ὅλον τὸ ἄθροισμα ὑπῆρχεν ἢ τὰ κυριώτατα μέρη τῆς φύσεως, οὐκ ἄν ποτε διέφερον ἀλλήλων αἱ ἡδοναί.

"The unreal conditionals either describe a situation which is contrary to fact, or which is unlikely to happen." ([Source](#))

So, my contention is that, while [PD09](#) is worded rather idiosyncratically, Epicurus is basically saying that pleasures do differ from each other and they can't actually be condensed. Which makes sense to me since he says elsewhere in [PD18](#) that: 18. "Pleasure in the flesh admits no increase when once the pain of want has been removed ; after that it only admits of variation ..." How could there be variation if all pleasures were the same?

Post by "Cassius" of September 10, 2023 at 7:23 AM

I don't know why Bailey didn't follow Hicks' construction and I am tempted just to replace Bailey's with Hicks, since Hicks is so much more clear, but for now I added Hicks as a footnote on our page here of the PD's. We have a lot of Bailey's critical apparatus so maybe there is an answer.

(But I see that the guys at the Epicurus Wiki did not follow Hicks) <http://wiki.epicurism.info/Principal Doctrine 9/>

(All of which reminds me to get back to that project of reviewing each one for changes to our list - We stopped right before we got to 9!)

[Principal Doctrines](#)

Edit: I now see NONE of the other translators Nate collected follow Hicks. Are they all presuming that we know that this construction implies the added "but it doesn't"? Or is there possibility of error in the Wikipedia analysis?

Post by "Cassius" of September 10, 2023 at 7:53 AM

I think everyone here is aware of this passage but I [posted it over at Facebook](#) this morning and will repeat that post here for consistency as people read this thread in the future:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3320-would-you-rather-live-for-a-week-as-1-epicurus-during-the-last-week-of-his-life/>

I am not posting this to imply that it provides a "best" answer to the hypothetical, but because a significant number of readers don't know that the Epicurean spokesman in Cicero's 'On Ends' had this to say about Epicurus' views:

[55] XVII. I will concisely explain what are the corollaries of these sure and well grounded opinions. People make no mistake about the standards of good and evil themselves, that is about pleasure or pain, but err in these matters through ignorance of the means by which these results are to be brought about. 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.

[57] But as we are elated by the blessings to which we look forward, so we delight in those which we call to memory.

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2023 at 8:45 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

(But I see that the guys at the Epicurus Wiki did not follow hicks)
http://wiki.epicurism.info/Principal_Doctrine_9/

They seem to agree with Hicks without adding the necessary parenthetical statement at the end like Hicks. It's the use of those two imperfect verb forms that clinches the idea:

Quote from Epicurus Wiki

Yet the pleasures do differ, Epicurus implies, since they cannot be thus condensed -- another syllogism by negative hypothesis, demonstrating that the opposite is in fact true.

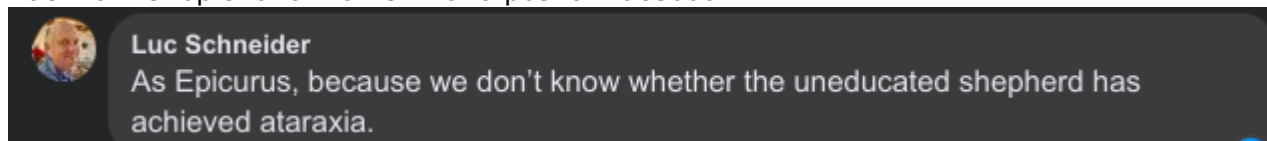
[Quote from Cassius](#)

Or is there possibility of error in the Wikipedia analysis?

The Wikipedia outline is correct and corroborated elsewhere. It's just is the cleanest and most straightforward presentation I found. I think this same analysis goes for [PD10](#) and [PD11](#) but I'm holding off on those for now.

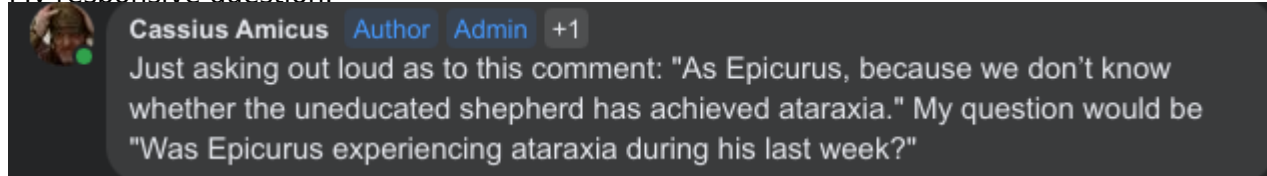
Post by "Cassius" of September 10, 2023 at 9:07 AM

Back to the topic for a moment for a post at Facebook:



"As Epicurus, because we don't know whether the uneducated shepherd has achieved ataraxia."

My responsive question:



Just asking out loud as to this comment: My question would be "Was Epicurus experiencing ataraxia during his last week?"

What do you guys think about this?

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2023 at 10:17 AM

Of course, we can never know what was happening in Epicurus's mind. That said...

Epicurus spent his life cultivating his peace of mind, banishing the fears of death and the gods. Ataraxia is the quality of having a mind free from turbulence, free from fear, free from anxiety. Given that definition, Epicurus undoubtedly experienced ataraxia. He had come to accept there was no life after death. He had no fear of some divine punishment. He had memories from the past and a company of friends in the present to comfort him. He was well aware of his physical illness and its outcome. There was undoubtedly times where physical pain overwhelmed him. But I don't think that means he didn't experience ataraxia in his mind. He felt the unimaginable pain, but didn't need to accompany that pain with anxiety, needless mental suffering, or similar turbulence in his *psykhē*, his "soul."

Post by “Cassius” of September 10, 2023 at 11:07 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Given that definition, Epicurus undoubtedly experienced ataraxia.

To drill down on this, was Epicurus experiencing ataraxia during that last week of his life?

Post by “Godfrey” of September 10, 2023 at 11:38 AM

Just to be clear, am I correct in saying that pleasures do differ, but *only* in intensity, duration and breadth? This is both how I read [PD09](#) and how I reason it out.

For instance, pleasure/pain in the toe is different from pleasure/pain of equal intensity and duration in the tongue, because of the different nerve endings in the two locations. If we could spread each of these instances of pleasure/pain over both the toe and the tongue, they would be the same. But as long as that doesn't happen, they're different. This, then, becomes a formula for how pleasures/pains vary.

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2023 at 11:43 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

Given that definition, Epicurus undoubtedly experienced ataraxia.

To drill down on this, was Epicurus experiencing ataraxia during that last week of his life?

According to my understanding: Yes.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 10, 2023 at 11:52 AM

At the risk of taking my reasoning too far, "breadth" also explains why pleasures differ from person to person. "Breadth" refers to location, and each person is a different location with different influences and slightly different anatomy.

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2023 at 12:00 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Just to be clear, am I correct in saying that pleasures do differ, but *only* in intensity, duration and breadth? This is both how I read [PD09](#) and how I reason it out.

For instance, pleasure/pain in the toe is different from pleasure/pain of equal intensity and duration in the tongue, because of the different nerve endings in the two locations. If we could spread each of these instances of pleasure/pain over both the toe and the tongue, they would be the same. But as long as that doesn't happen, they're different. This, then, becomes a formula for how pleasures/pains vary.

Pleasure do differ, that's my interpretation of [PD09](#) from the grammar. But I'm still not sure I understand where you're getting the specific parameters of intensity, duration, and breadth

from the words that are in [PD09](#).

From what I read, Epicurus is specifically saying "Every pleasure *cannot* condensed nor be present at the same time and in the whole of one's nature or its primary parts." The "if.." clause cannot happen, and so the pleasures do differ from one another.

Post by “Plantpierogi” of September 10, 2023 at 12:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Plantpierogi](#)

If I wanted to be a lay in the grass in the summertime for a week, I would simply wait 9 months. Besides, a shepherd's life never appealed to me, anyway.

Great thoughts in that post Plantpierogi and good to see back you on the forum again!

Great to be back 😊. I want to try and pop in every now and then. Hopefully, I'll make participation here more of a habit. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of September 10, 2023 at 12:38 PM

Godfrey: I would think the part of body affected is a distinguishing factors in pleasures so I am not sure how long the list of differences should be.

Don: unless ataraxia is limited to "mental" disturbance I cannot see how Epicurus experienced ataraxia during his last week, given his pain , and I am not sure I would say he did experience ataraxia at that time even if the definition of ataraxia were limited to mental issues, just as I think aponia is not limited to bodily pains.

This would be an important part of the discussion to develop.

I would see human ataraxia as denoting real experience delimited in time and not a lifetime sum.

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2023 at 1:09 PM

Did you want to open up a different thread to discuss the ataraxia issue or just keep going here? I have thoughts (of course)

Post by “Cassius” of September 10, 2023 at 2:55 PM

Well I was about to say a separate thread, but as I think about it (and as the Facebook comment implies) the question is probably tightly tied to ones idea of how to spend ones time in the best way, so let's say here.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 10, 2023 at 8:07 PM

Quote from Don

Pleasure do differ, that's my interpretation of [PD09](#) from the grammar. But I'm still not sure I understand where you're getting the specific parameters of intensity, duration, and breadth from the words that are in [PD09](#).

From what I read, Epicurus is specifically saying "Every pleasure *cannot* condensed nor be present at the same time and in the whole of one's nature or its primary parts." The "if.." clause cannot happen, and so the pleasures do differ from one another.

Intensity: Hicks uses the word "accumulation", Bailey uses "intensified", DeWitt uses "condensed", White uses "concentrated"; the other translations in Nate's compilation use variations of these. I'm interpreting these English words as describing intensity of pleasure, and, to me, it's clear that pleasures can vary in intensity.

Duration: all of the translations use "time", "duration", "lasted", or similar references to time. I'm calling these "duration".

Breadth: the translations all refer to "parts"; I'm using "breadth" to describe the idea that pleasures can vary in the number of "parts" that they affect. These include toes, tongues, mind: various body parts and various states of mind.

I don't interpret Epicurus' "if" as referring to "condensed". I interpret it as referring to maximizing particular pleasures in all three aspects of intensity duration and breadth. If this could be done, then the pleasures wouldn't differ from each other. They can't be maximized in such a way, so they do differ. But by using intensity, duration and breadth as the three criteria in this statement he is telling us that those are the three variables which affect pleasures and differentiate between them.

Post by “Don” of September 10, 2023 at 9:22 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Hicks uses the word "accumulation", Bailey uses "intensified", DeWitt uses "condensed", White uses "concentrated"; the other translations in Nate's compilation use variations of these.

The word used there in the [PD09](#) is καταπυκνοῦτο which means "force into a small compass, compress, condense." Another translation seems to be "to be thickly planted" and "consolidate."

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, καταπυκν-όω](#)

It's related directly to πυκνόω which means "pack close together, contract, condense, compress" and can even be used to refer to frozen water.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, πυκν-όω](#)

Post by “Don” of September 11, 2023 at 11:05 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Well I was about to say a separate thread, but as I think about it (and as the Facebook comment implies) the question is probably tightly tied to ones idea of how to spend ones time in the best way, so let's say here.

Sounds good.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Don: unless ataraxia is limited to "mental" disturbance I cannot see how Epicurus experienced ataraxia during his last week, given his pain , and I am not sure I would say he did experience ataraxia at that time even if the definition of ataraxia were limited to mental issues, just as I think aponia is not limited to bodily pains.

...

I would see human ataraxia as denoting real experience delimited in time and not a lifetime sum.

We first have to come to an understanding of what we both mean by "ataraxia." And I'm not saying we both have the *same* understanding, or that either of us has the correct understanding. Here's my understanding.

I completely agree with your mention of "not a lifetime sum." I apologize if I implied that in my saying "Epicurus spent his life cultivating his peace of mind, banishing the fears of death and the gods." What I meant to convey was that you don't just experience ataraxia *ex nihilo*. Ataraxia grows out of ones practice and study to eradicate the fears and anxiety of death, the gods, and so on.

Ataraxia is the pleasure of experiencing a mind free from anxiety, fear, etc. It is a mind (psykhe) without παραχή (tarakhe) "trouble, disorder, confusion." So, αταραξία (ataraksia) conveys a mind "without trouble, without disorder, without confusion." Consider another instance of αταραξία in Fragment 519: "The greatest fruit of justice is serenity." (δικαιοσύνης καρπὸς μέγιστος ἀταραξία.) If we act justly, we don't have to have anxiety, fear, and worry about our fellow humans. This is echoed in [PD17](#): "One who acts aright is *utterly steady and serene* (ἀταρακτότατος ataraktotatos), whereas one who goes astray is full of *trouble and confusion* (παραχῆς tarakhes)."

Ataraxia is experienced as a mind untroubled by fear of the gods, anxiety about death, trust in that you are treating people justly and can expect the same in return. Once those fears and anxieties are rooted out, they don't return. One characteristic of an Epicurean sage (which we can assume Epicurus himself would have been as close as possible to as anyone) is "once the sage has become wise, they will no longer fall back into the opposite (of wisdom)."

For me, ataraxia is not some "special" state one achieves in special circumstances, not some kind of meditative tranquility, not some kind of transitory fleeting feeling. Ataraxia is the prolonged/persistent feeling of a mind untroubled by fear, anxiety, and so (as outlined above). It is the solid foundation of a state of mind through which one can experience the world free from those fears, anxieties, and so on. *On Piety* by Philodemus provides the line (1532-3) "...we (Epicureans) all regard our doctrines/teachings (dogmata) as the true cause of our own tranquility (ataraxia)."

Which brings me back to your original question: "Was Epicurus experiencing ataraxia during that last week of his life?" Given *my* understanding of ataraxia as outlined here, my answer would be "yes... to the extent that he was in possession of his mental faculties between bouts of severe pain." But even when in pain, I would say he still experienced the world with his mind grounded in ataraxia. He would have had no anxiety about the gods. He would have had no fear of death. He knew he treated people fairly and that he was surrounded by friends. He had made as many preparations for the future of his school as was possible and took pleasure in imagining his friends and students continuing on after he ceased to exist. That to me is the textbook experience of ataraxia, so, yes, Epicurus was experiencing ataraxia during the last week of his life to the extent that his failing body would allow him to be cognizant of it.

Post by "Cassius" of September 12, 2023 at 6:55 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Ataraxia is experienced as a mind untroubled by fear of the gods, anxiety about death, trust in that you are treating people justly and can expect the same in return.

Ok so it does in fact seem you are using ataraxia to describe a specific type of being untroubled (about gods and death primarily, but maybe including a few other things), and that you don't include the trouble of the sharp pain of advanced kidney disease to be within the scope of the word.

Are you saying also that this was specifically Epicurus' use of the word, or that this use applies every time the word ataraxia occurs in ancient Greek?

In the case of the gods it seems we have specific statements from Epicurus that show he was using a modified definition of a common term. Do we have similar statements in ancient Greek? I gather that there is evidence the word was used by the Stoics and perhaps Pyrrhonists, so this would be another word where Epicurus had a specific definition?

It would be helpful if it were but I gather that ataraxia is not the word used here(?)

[22] When he was on the point of death he wrote the following letter to Idomeneus: 'On this truly happy day of my life, as I am at the point of death, I write this to you. The disease in my bladder and stomach are pursuing their course, lacking nothing of their natural severity: but against all this is the joy in my heart at the recollection of my conversations with you. Do you, as I might expect from your devotion from boyhood to me and to philosophy, take good care of the children of Metrodorus.' Such then was his will.

30. Τὴν μακαρίαν ἄγοντες καὶ ἅμα τελευτῶντες ἡμέραν τοῦ βίου ἐγράφομεν ὑμῖν ταυτί· στραγγουρικά τε παρηκολούθει καὶ δυσεντερικὰ πάθη ὑπερβολὴν οὐκ ἀπολείποντα τοῦ ἐν

[Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, I, ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΟΣ](#)

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2023 at 7:26 AM

The words used in the letter to Idomeneus are ψυχὴν χαῖρον (psykhē khairon) "gladness/joy of mind". χαῖρον is "rejoice at, take pleasure in a thing" which is a form of the word χαρά, one of the kinetic pleasures listed with euprosyne. So, he's specifically saying he places the joy of his memories against the pain of his illness there in the letter. But that doesn't preclude an experience of ataraxia with respect to fears and anxiety.

Hicks at Perseus: 22] Ἦδη δὲ τελευτῶν γράφει πρὸς Ἰδομενέα (Idomeneus) τήνδε ἐπιστολήν:

"Τὴν μακαρίαν ἄγοντες καὶ ἅμα τελευταίαν ἡμέραν τοῦ βίου ἐγράφομεν ὑμῖν ταυτί. στραγγουρία τε παρηκολουθήκει καὶ δυσεντερικὰ πάθη ὑπερβολὴν οὐκ ἀπολείποντα τοῦ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς μεγέθους. ἀντιπαρετάττετο δὲ πᾶσι τούτοις τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν γεγονότων ἡμῖν διαλογισμῶν μνήμη. σὺ δ' ἀξίως τῆς ἐκ μειρακίου παραστάσεως πρὸς ἐμὲ καὶ φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιμελοῦ τῶν παίδων Μητροδώρου."

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2023 at 7:36 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Ok so it does in fact seem you are using ataraxia to describe a specific type of being untroubled (about gods and death primarily, but maybe including a few other things), and that you don't include the trouble of the sharp pain of advanced kidney disease to be within the scope of the word.

Correct. Ataraxia appears to be achieved by rooting out fears and anxiety, leaving the mind to be free of those disturbances.

PS. I would also include that it is achieved as well through an understanding of natural science and how the world works, including celestial and meteorological phenomena, and also living virtuously. It is having the mind in a secure harbor, undisturbed by fears and anxieties.

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2023 at 8:15 AM

Here's C. CASSIUS LONGINUS TO CICERO in a letter (Cic. Fam. 15.19)

[Perseus Under Philologic: Cic. Fam. 15.19.1](#)

and joking with you in person. Nor does this come to pass owing to Catius's "images": [Note] for which expression I will in my next retort on you by quoting such a number of ill-educated Stoics, that you will acknowledge Catius to have been a true-born Athenian. That our friend Pansa left the city in military array with such expressions of goodwill from everybody, I rejoice both for his own sake and also, by Hercules, for the sake of all our party. For I hope that people will understand how odious cruelty is to everybody, and how attractive honesty

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and clemency: and that the objects which bad men seek and desire above everything come spontaneously to the good. For it is difficult to persuade men that "the good is desirable for its own sake": but that "pleasure" and "peace of mind" [Note]

ἀταραξίαν, a Stoic term. Cassius retorts on the Stoics that this ἀταραξία which they advocate is best obtained by the Epicurean doctrines.

are obtained by virtue, justice, and "the good" is both true and convincing. In fact, Epicurus himself says—from whom all your Catiuses and Amafiniuses, those poor translators of his words, proceed—"to live pleasantly is impossible without living well and justly." So it is that Pansa, whose summum bonum is "pleasure," keeps his virtue; and those too who are called by you "pleasure-lovers" are "lovers of the good" and "lovers of the just," [Note]

Cassius uses Greek words for these philosophical terms φιλήδονοι, φιλοκαλοὶ, φιλοδίκαιοι. For Sulla, see p.185.

and practise and maintain all the virtues. Accordingly Sulla, whose

Post by "Cassius" of September 12, 2023 at 9:10 AM

So that would be an example of someone using ataraxia in a general sense, because he is saying that the Stoics could achieve their tranquility better through Epicurean views than through their own views. But doesn't that mean that ataraxia is being used as a generic term to refer to a general "peace of mind" rather than to a term that is uniquely Epicurean?

The point of my question here is that I can see a lot of reason why "ataraxia" can be translated into a generic "peace of mind" or "absence of disturbance" that could apply to most anyone of any philosophy or religion at any particular moment. In contrast, I don't see it to be a good idea to consider that "ataraxia" has a specifically Epicurean meaning that justifies elevating it in the way that many writers today tend to elevate it. It's that elevation that I think we see over and over and is what I would expect would be behind the statement by Luc Schneider:

4096-pasted-from-clipboard-png

In fairness to Luc I think this is the way you will often see the term ataraxia used, which would be consistent with the analogy you used to the effect of "once wise always wise." Is ataraxia something that which, once achieved, is not lost?

Or is ataraxia some particular point of achievement, like snatching a prize at the end of the race, that if achieved for a single moment, is worth all the other time and effort spent pursuing it?

I would see Epicurus' statement as targeted toward those such as Socrates who effect to be unwise in their discussion and I would not see wisdom as something that "once achieved" cannot be lost. Do not wise men often act unwisely, even if only by mistake?

And of course to bring this back to topic, I wouldn't think I would judge whether I wanted to be Epicurus or the shepherd for a week according to whether either one of them "had achieved ataraxia." Would you see that (whether the person as "achieved ataraxia" as a reasonable way to make that decision?

Edit: "Or is ataraxia some particular point of achievement, like snatching a prize at the end of the race, that if achieved for a single moment, is worth all the other time and effort spent pursuing it?" << I like this way of framing the question as I think this presumption is getting closer to the real issue.

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2023 at 9:24 AM

Just by coincidence I see [this article in my daily blast from Academia](#):

Ataraxia: Tranquility at the End

Pascal Massie

In their investigation of “eudaimonia” (happiness, human flourishing) Hellenistic philosophers (i.e., members of the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Sceptic schools) made frequent use of terms that were relatively new in the philosophical lexicon; among others: ataraxia (freedom from disturbance), hēsychia (serenity), tranquillitas and securitas (Seneca and Cicero’s Latin translation of euthymia), eustatheia (stability), athambia (quietness), adiaphora (indifference), and apatheia (the condition of being unmoved).

Even though most of them did not simply identify eudaimonia with ataraxia, it still remains that the notion of happiness they proposed took on a new significance because of this emphasis on ataraxia and related notions. At stake is not simply a particular development in the history of ancient philosophy; the issue runs much deeper. It entails a transformation of the very meaning of philosophy. When eudaimonia is determined in terms of ataraxia the very purpose and meaning of philosophy also changes. To be a philosopher is first and foremost a matter of conquering fears and desires and the esteem one should bestow upon a philosophical school depends primarily on its ability to lead us to such an end. In other words, the emergence of ataraxia at the core of ethical discourse is deeply rooted in a renewed understanding of philosophy itself.

...

However, during the Hellenistic era three new developments occurred: (a) It is argued that one can measure a philosophical system by its ability to lead its disciples to happiness. Thus, eudaimonia becomes a meta-philosophical criterion. Philosophy is instrumental to happiness just as medicine is instrumental to health. But on this count (b) both Plato and Aristotle have failed. Their followers are no closer to happiness than nonphilosophers. (c) The solution (if not in full, at least in a significant part) demands that the requirements for happiness be reevaluated. For the Epicureans and the Sceptics eudaimonia calls for the attainment of ataraxia. The Stoics held a rather similar view, although they prefer the term apatheia.

568 What is striking in all these new terms (although not perceptible in most translations) is that the determination of this requirement is, in its linguistic form, mostly negative (a-taraxia, a-patheia, a-diaphora). Happiness is not the achievement or the attainment of a human potential; rather, it is a release from worry, anxiety, and disturbance; a liberation that results from the therapeutic examination of our belief⁵⁶⁹. This new focus reveals that the inner conflicts of the soul have become the chief concern since they are now identified as the main obstacle to happiness. Thus, ataraxia seems to name an absence, a lack. Many, following Hegel's pronouncement, have diagnosed this aim of life as a sheer renunciation of the world and a withdrawal into self-satisfaction.

Post by "Cassius" of September 12, 2023 at 9:31 AM

Here's a particularly interesting passage comparing ataraxia to be a model, not a condition:

Kinetic pleasures for their part remain by definition incomplete for so long as the animal keeps drinking it is still thirsty. In kinetic pleasures one experiences the progressive lessening of pain - which presupposes that some form of pain or discomfort is still there in the first place. By contrast, katastematic pleasures are stable and they are so because they are fundamentally finite in the sense that they repel the infinite frustration of ordinary kinetic desires. "The removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. Wherever pleasure is present, and as long as it is present, a

feeling of pain, a feeling of distress, or their combination is absent." (D L 10, Maxim 3).

The little clause "as long as it is present" indicates that Epicurus does not posit the stability of katastematic pleasures as everlasting; for this reason the pursuit of ataraxia does not aim at a beatitude that would transcend our mortal condition. A state of supernatural blessedness is not an option. It is true that Epicurean texts often invoke the calm bliss the gods are said to enjoy, but for us the divine is a model, not a destination. The end of human life must be compatible with the human condition but this condition entails being subjected to needs and lacks, the awareness of which constitutes an experience of pain and their satisfaction an experience of kinetic pleasure.

But first what could it be to experience ataraxia? The Epicurean ataraxia is not simply a "state of mind" (pace Striker); it is a state of being that depends on the discovery of

another form of pleasure, the pleasure of being rather than the pleasure of possessing or consuming. To pursue the arithmetical analogy, one could say that for all positive numbers there corresponds a negative number; 0 however admits of no opposite. Of course ataraxia is not a degree zero since, as we saw earlier, it is already pleasure and Epicurus' insistence on the idea that ataraxia is a form of pleasure rules out a common objection according to which one who follows such an ethics would live a life of indifference. Instead, ataraxia corresponds to the pleasure of being that comes from knowing one's limits.

(Unfortunately there is no real concluding paragraph that summarizes the entire article.)

Note: A very good line:

[Quote from Article](#)

but for us the divine is a model, not a destination.

Post by "Pacatus" of September 12, 2023 at 4:00 PM

Once, when I was (legally) required to be in a meeting where I was going to be under (deceitful and unjust) attack, I sought the counsel of a wise friend (a social-worker clinical therapist with whom I did therapy for some time, who also became a valued friend). What he said was this: "Let me tell you what you are required to do: to put your body in that place for the prescribed time. That's it. Make yourself comfortable - and do not engage. You don't have to argue, you don't have to even respond to their questions. You can let your mind go wherever you want - you can plan a vacation, you can imagine or remember a pleasant scenario in your life. And when the time is up, you can just leave."

Which is what I did. I did not engage my mind in any of the negativity.

+++++

With that said, [Don](#) has often stressed that *ataraxia* is not the be-all-end-all for an Epicurean: *aponia* is (on the negative side) the other blade of the scissors.* In the throes of severe pain, Epicurus may well have struggled to maintain ataraxia and enjoy the pleasures of the mind (and he may have drifted in and out of consciousness). But he had the tools make the best job

of it.

My therapist friend would recommend the same kind of tools.

+++++

* The Stoics seem to dismiss *pone* as something almost irrelevant to the *apatheia* of the sage. The Pyrrhonians simply stress *ataraxia*, without, as I recall, much attention to *pone*.

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2023 at 11:30 PM

Great find on the Massie paper, [Cassius](#) !

I've read the Epicurean section specifically but should read the rest, too.

However, I do find several excerpts very interesting, including:

Quote

Not only are kinetic pleasures unavoidable and should be welcomed, but in a sense *katastematic* pleasures are paradoxically the target that all quests for pleasure (even kinetic ones) secretly aims at. To see this, we need to ask whether the ultimate object of desire is really an object. Pleasure is commonly understood as delight

in something, enjoyment of something. In other words, pleasure assumes an object and construes itself as a relation to this object. ... the common experience of pleasure is one in which desire recognizes its dependence on an object that, even when consumed, remains an [alterity](#). For this reason all our common desires seek the impossible since they seek the unlimited. Epicurus' answer, articulated in the concept of *ataraxia*, consists in seeking a pleasure without object, a pleasure without anything outside of itself; true happiness can only be construed in terms of self-sufficiency.

With self-sufficiency, the need for another disappears insofar as one traces a limit within which one can maintain one's own existence. As we saw, the problem inherent to any attempt to fulfill one's desires is the endlessness of desire and *ataraxia* is meant to be the answer, the only form of pleasure that ends the madness of desire. Freedom from disturbance and suffering is a matter of putting a halt to the unlimited. This is possible

because there is at least one formula which, in principle, could resolve the conundrum. To resolve the frustration of unsatisfied desire, the seeker of pleasure must discover in herself (in her own very existence), the object of her delight. The pleasure that is found in being (rather than in having or doing) is a pleasure beyond desire because it is a pleasure without object, or, if we must still talk of an object of desire, this object is not alien to the seeker anymore. Self-sufficiency (autarkeia) is therefore the hallmark of ataraxia and the search

for happiness turns out to be a search for freedom, since it does not depend on anything but itself.

I realize that's a rather lengthy excerpt, but I think it's a novel take on ataraxia as well as the katastematic/kinetic issue. There is nothing wrong with kinetic desires, in fact, they should be "welcomed." But Massie is positing that ataraxia, the katastematic pleasure, is something that only has the person's existence itself, the joy of being, as the source of its delight. I like that idea, and it bumps up against or is adjacent to DeWitt's "the greatest good is life itself" but avoids DeWitt's tautological conundrum since "If life is the greatest good, but the greatest good is that to which everything else points to, so life points to living,, etc." (I've been down this road many times so I'll let it lie there.) Massie has a novel take in that ataraxia is joy in living free from frustration, disturbance, and suffering in the mind. I would still maintain that ataraxia is achieved by getting rid of the fears of god, death, etc., etc., but once those are removed, ataraxia is the joy one gets from *being* in that *state* of freedom from fear, disturbance, etc. The one who is feeling ataraxia is self-sufficient in their own being, while continuing to enjoy the varied pleasures that come along from kinetic pleasures. Again, I like the "swimming in the ocean, surfing on the waves" metaphor that [Godfrey](#) helped refine a while back.

So, did Epicurus experience ataraxia in his last week? Using Massie's approach, I would continue to say yes, to the extent that Epicurus was able to experience anything other than pain.

Post by "Don" of September 12, 2023 at 11:58 PM

The mention of ataraxia in the letter to Herodotus is noteworthy, too:

Quote from Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus

[82] ἡ δὲ ἀταραξία τὸ τούτων πάντων ἀπολελύσθαι καὶ συνεχῆ μνήμην ἔχειν τῶν ὄλων καὶ κυριωτάτων.

[82] But mental tranquillity (ataraxia) means being released from all these troubles and cherishing a continual remembrance of the highest and most important truths. (Hicks)

And the real freedom from this kind of trouble consists in being emancipated from all these things, and in preserving the recollection of all the principles which we have established, especially of the most essential of them. (Yonge)

The troubles one is released from have to be fear and anxiety of gods, death, etc., since the section directly preceding this about the importance of atarxia is:

Quote

We must also recollect that that which principally contributes to trouble the spirit of men is the persuasion which they cherish that the stars are beings imperishable and perfectly happy, and that then one's thoughts and actions are in contradiction to the will of these superior beings; they also, [454] being deluded by these fables, apprehend an eternity of evils, they fear the insensibility of death, as that could affect them. What do I say? It is not even belief, but inconsiderateness and blindness which govern them in every thing, to such a degree that, not calculating these fears, they are just as much troubled as if they had really faith in these vain phantoms. (Yonge)

Post by "Cassius" of September 13, 2023 at 7:04 AM

Thanks Don. Possibly for present purposes we are coming near to exhausting the ataraxia angle, with the immediate issue of ataraxia not being a transcendent state of epiphany or a final destination that once achieved either justifies the effort to that point or describes a particular experience of a particular activity which can be equated to "seeing the Mona Lisa before you die" or something specific like that. i am gathering that we both agree with this formulation from Massie:

Quote

the little clause "as long as it is present" indicates that Epicurus does not posit the stability

of katastematic pleasures as everlasting; for this reason the pursuit of ataraxia does not aim

at a beatitude that would transcend our mortal condition. A state of supernatural blessedness is not an option. It is true that Epicurean texts often invoke the calm bliss the gods are said to enjoy, but for us the divine is a model, not a destination.

[Quote from Don](#)

I like that idea, and it bumps up against or is adjacent to DeWitt's "the greatest good is life itself" but avoids DeWitt's tautological conundrum since "If life is the greatest good, but the greatest good is that to which everything else points to, so life points to living,, etc."

And yes I agree too. I think Dewitt would have been better off saying 'life in the absence of pain is the greatest good' if he wanted to make a point that "pleasure" isn't the only way to describe the greatest good. If we are rigorously clear in defining and explaining how "life in the absence of pain" is pleasure, then we're all saying much the same thing.

However the ones who *aren't* saying the same thing are the ones - I would think - who imply that "life in the absence of pain" is some specific esoteric and unique experience (like seeing the Mona Lisa) which requires some kind of higher plane of consciousness to understand and does not fall under the umbrella of the term "pleasure" as ordinary people can understand it. And there I would criticize those who simply say "pleasure is the absence of pain" without explaining the issue that we are discussing. I don't fault Epicurus in the letter to Menoecus because I think his readers of the time would have had reams of other material which make the point clear. And I now think that the point remained clear through Cicero's time given a full reading of what is included in "On Ends."

But over the last 2000 years Cicero's refusal to accept the terminology and his resulting argument that the framework makes no sense has won the day. The real fault is in us because we are so indoctrinated in a restrictive definition of pleasure that we can't see the wider point. So now we have to go back and explain how we got to where we are today and how everything fits together under an expansive definition of pleasure that is more than just "sex, drugs, and rock and roll."

(Which come to think of it is what Torquatus spends so much time doing in his narrative in on ends where he links the virtues to being productive of pleasure.)

I think one of the real challenges is how to convey a mindset such that it isn't shocking to think that if you tell your dentist: "Doctor my tooth does not hurt," then your dentist should justifiably say in return: "Then your tooth is at the height of pleasure!"

Yes it's true that most people don't ordinarily think that way, but that doesn't mean that they can't think that way, or that they wouldn't be better off if they did so.

To use a religious analogy, talking about "pleasure" in a truncated, restricted, narrow, and incomplete form (such as Cicero insists on doing) would be like a Christian talking about Jesus as a good carpenter.

Post by "Don" of September 13, 2023 at 8:13 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Possibly for present purposes we are coming near to exhausting the ataraxia angle

Agreed... But have we answered your question about Epicurus?

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the immediate issue of ataraxia not being a transcendent state of epiphany or a final destination that once achieved either justifies the effort to that point or describes a particular experience of a particular activity which can be equated to "seeing the Mona Lisa before you die" or something specific like that.

Agreed. Ataraxia is not some rarefied special "state of epiphany." I think I've outlined my position in this thread, but I would expand on that, however, to say that my interpretation is that Epicurus taught that we need both katastematic and kinetic pleasures for a complete life. I'm beginning to really like, if I may say, the formulation of something like "floating on the ocean, surfing on the waves" to convey that symbiotic relationship between katastematic and kinetic pleasures.

We've been concentrating on ataraxia but I wanted to add a word for aponia. To me, aponia is NOT "feeling no pain." To complement the sense of ataraxia as being taking joy in living with one's disturbance-free mind, aponia to me is taking delight in the smooth functioning of the body, being in the flow with your body functioning well. Taking this tack, I can see how katastematic pleasure can come and go. I certainly only have fleeting feelings of aponia. I'm better at experiencing feelings of ataraxia, albeit it's a work in progress.

I would agree that the common knowledge has become ataraxia is a special unique mystical state etc. Syncretism and conflation with other traditions is at play in my opinion. Additionally, I think Epicurus's philosophy is very practical and down to earth and open to all. People/academics don't want practical, down to earth. They want Ideal Forms, Essences, Prime

Movers, the Logos, mystery, mysticism, and so on. Massie's paper gets us moving in a more practical, down to earth direction.

Post by “Cassius” of September 13, 2023 at 9:20 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I would agree that the common knowledge has become ataraxia is a special unique mystical state etc. Syncretism and conflation with other traditions is at play in my opinion. Additionally, I think Epicurus's philosophy is very practical and down to earth and open to all. People/academics don't want practical, down to earth. They want Ideal Forms, Essences, Prime Movers, the Logos, mystery, mysticism, and so on.

Yes - very well stated. This is the foundation on which we move forward, and it needs to be understood as pretty much the "theme" of everything we are doing with EpicureanFriends.com. You've stated both sides that I think are important: (1) the common sense understanding that any person of normal intelligence can grasp Epicurean philosophy as a way of organizing the universe, and (2) the unpleasant fact that we're not just facing internal fears, anxieties, and understandings, but we're also facing an active, organized, opposition of which Cicero was not the first and definitely not the last. Cicero's opinion dominates today - maybe it always dominated, even in Epicurus's day. And today's Cicero's don't just have a limited audience of rich people for their opinions, they can broadcast them to *everyone* in seconds on Twitter and the like.

So in the modern world Cicero's perspective is probably even more dominant and more dangerous. Another example is that in this week's podcast Joshua makes the point that to the extent that people today no longer have the same familiarity with death in our daily lives, we are worse off than in the past in the amount of knowledge most people have.

Even though today most people have some basic knowledge of natural science, I don't believe that has translated at a mass scale into the fading away of religious superstition and fears of heaven and hell. The adoption of the position "God created the atoms" has anesthetized the majority into thinking they can have their cake and eat it too by blending superstition with "science." I think the key to counterattacking on that issue is already contained in the arguments in Herodotus and Lucretius, so we have plenty with which to work. That means not slighting the "physics" side of things on the mistaken idea that everyone understands atoms and void and that solves the problem.

So in general I'd say that the circumstances of today with technology and social media making it easier for peer pressure to suppress unwanted ideas require creative responses -- analogous

to Lucretius stepping "out of the box" to produce his poem. With the two points you raised and I quoted above being central to moving forward.

Post by "Cassius" of September 13, 2023 at 9:29 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Agreed... But have we answered your question about Epicurus?

In terms of the original hypothetical question, I don't think we have answered that. I don't think there is an answer that applies to everyone except in general terms, but thinking through the problem does - in my view - help focus the mind.

I would think it is crucial for people to realize that the pleasures of the body (the shepherd in the field) don't always or even most of the time trump the pleasures of the mind (Epicurus). The difficult aspect is the amount of physical pain Epicurus was in, and that leads us to examine how we personally want to measure physical vs mental pains and pleasures.

The development of exercises to encourage people to focus on seeing how mental pleasures and physical pleasures combine to constitute the full goal of "pleasure" is probably a good idea. And in the meantime we can explain that, given there is no neutral state, if you are not in pain you are feeling pleasure, and if you truly are feeling "no" pain then you are feeling the most pleasure that is possible for you to feel.

So the sentence I included above about the dentist needs to be seen as not a word game, but indicative of an organizing perspective on everything in life:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think one of the real challenges is how to convey a mindset such that it isn't shocking to think that if you tell your dentist: "Doctor my tooth does not hurt," then your dentist should justifiably say in return: "Then your tooth is at the height of pleasure!"

Since "Pleasure" is the flag that stands against religious superstition, idealism, nihilism, and the rest, it's important to think clearly about how sweeping a term pleasure is, and to then realize exactly how, and in what respect, "the absence of pain is pleasure." The wording is very defensible but cries out for further explanation, and if that explanation is not provided then under current circumstances very little is gained and even worse much is lost given the background static that distorts the message.

Once that perspective becomes understandable and not seen as a call to ascetic transcendentalism, then the common sense application of the desires and pursuing those that are natural and necessary and looking to what will happen to us as a result of our choices and all the other advice falls into perfect consistency and common sense.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of September 13, 2023 at 10:51 AM

Maybe a cheeky answer but I'd live as epicurus and hide a lot of my writings in somewhere I know they would be found 2400 years later 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of September 13, 2023 at 11:47 AM

Quote from Cassius

The development of exercises to encourage people to focus on seeing how mental pleasures and physical pleasures combine to constitute the full goal of "pleasure" is probably a good idea.

The way I read [PD09](#), which is the way about half of the translations render it, is that pleasures and pains can be described by intensity, duration and location. Thinking about activities that expand the location of pleasures can then help with what's stated in the above quote.

For instance, many pleasures are experienced both physically and mentally at the same time: relief at escaping trauma, the awe of a blazing sunset, the list goes on.... Thinking about this facet (location, or breadth as I also like to think of it) can be useful in understanding the nature of pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 9:14 AM

[New followup at Facebook:](#)

John Bramwell

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3320-would-you-rather-live-for-a-week-as-1-epicurus-during-the-last-week-of-his-life/>

On the 9th September Cassius Amicus posed an interesting question whether I would prefer to be an ignorant shepherd lying in the grass or Epicurus in pain both with only a week to live.

There is no easy answer to this poser as there are other factors to be contemplated. Did the young shepherd have an old widowed mother to take care of etc.

But what if the period of time were different and what if they did not know the time frame at all.

Had the shepherd been told of the horrors that might await him, all sorts of things.

I am not going to give an opinion except that I think it is only human beings that have a concept of death and once this "cat" was out of the bag there was no going back.

Perhaps I am being naive but I believe that Epicurus put the cat back in the bag, so to speak.

CASSIUS REPLY:

Hi John. The point in the hypothetical was to compare the life of an educated Epicurean, even with significant physical pain (Epicurus), to the life of an uneducated regular person who spends his or her time without significant physical pain (the hypothetical shepherd). As you say, there are all sorts of unknowns in the hypothetical, but the issue involves assessing what "absence of pain" really means in Epicurean philosophy and how we process that term as the goal of life.

This is a subject on which Cicero criticized Epicurus extensively in Book 2 of Cicero's "On Ends," and that's the subject of our most recent Episode 195 of the Lucretius Today podcast.

Ultimately I think there is no absolute answer to the question of which life is "best" or which "should" be preferred. There are no divine answers or Platonic absolutes which establish which is "better." We all have our own feelings of pleasure and pain as to what is most significant to us, and we can offset pleasures against pains and still find a predominance of pleasure even in situations involving significant pain.

I respect anyone who answers differently from me as having a right to their own opinion, but I know which I personally prefer to choose in my own life. I frequently choose actions which bring some amount of pain in exchange for greater pleasure thereafter, and I do not obsess over avoiding all forms of pain every second of my life.

I think the position we take on what Epicurus is saying on this point is the difference between considering Epicurus to be the greatest philosopher of the western world vs. considering Epicurus to be a ho-hum also-ran.

Note: the podcast post is here:

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of October 21, 2023 at 1:27 PM

I actually changed my opinion on this, the lack of pain alone is actually still painful because it still an absence of pleasure. We are made to be filled with pleasure so the very lack of it is actually painful, I had this acutely after having a small procedure I was in basically a non state but then I remembered there is no non state it's always either pleasure or pain so the very absence of any pleasure DESPITE being completely pain free ended up being painful to me. So in the end I would be Epicurus for a week despite his pain.

Post by “Cassius” of October 21, 2023 at 9:11 PM

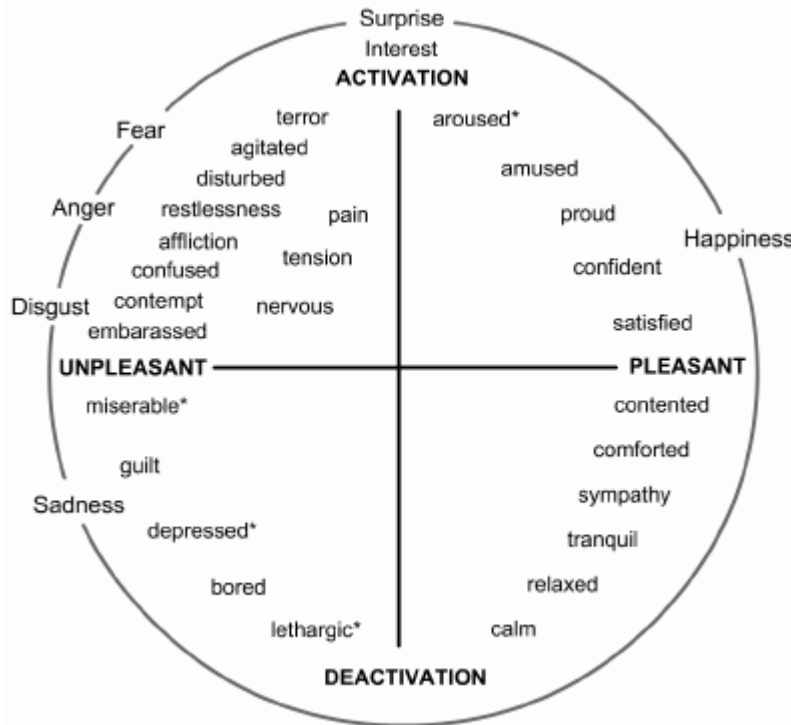
[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

I had this acutely after having a small procedure I was in basically a non state but then I remembered there is no non state it's always either pleasure or pain so the very absence of any pleasure DESPITE being completely pain free ended up being painful to me.

Eoghan I think I understand what you are saying, and I agree with your ultimate conclusion, but I wanted to throw this out there fore consideration: As I am reading Torquatus now, unless you are saying that you were "unconscious" in the condition you were in, I don't think the Torquatus interpretation of pleasure would allow someone to say that they were "completely free of pain" and not then - by virtue of those words - concluding that such a person was in a state of pleasure -- in fact, the highest state. Maybe you are saying you were unconscious, or numb (which is painful) but as I am reading the words now -- such as the quote which is currently at the top of the forum - it seems to me that the Epicureans were being rigorously logical in their word use: IF it is stated that a person is painfree, THEN - without any further need for information or deliberation - then that person is defined to be in pleasure, and in fact the greatest pleasure possible, since you are stating that they are "pain free."

I know this type of analysis is striking some people as impractical and unusual, and that's in fact exactly how Cicero was describing it to Torquatus. But if we take Torquatus at his word, and I think we can, then this seems to be the way the Epicureans were thinking. Cicero's crimes against Epicurus come mostly in the omission of important explanations, but in my view when he places a clear statement in the mouth of an Epicurean - and in this case he does this with Torquatus over and over and over again - I think it can be trusted that this in fact was the Epicurean position.

Post by "Don" of October 21, 2023 at 9:30 PM



ussions:

Pleasant affect = what Epicurus calls pleasure

Unpleasant= what Epicurus calls pain

Activation & Deactivation equals the level of "excitement"

There's really no 0,0 point .

Post by "Godfrey" of October 21, 2023 at 11:50 PM

From the circumplex, I interpret what [Eoghan Gardiner](#) is describing to be near the bottom of the "Deactivation" axis. With such a low amount of "excitement", it would be very difficult to distinguish pleasure or pain even though the feeling is still there. Additionally from the circumplex, the feeling would not be very strong. But it would still be there as either a pleasure

or a pain.

This aligns with my intuition. But it's difficult to intuit the idea that the absence of pain is the greatest pleasure. It's logically correct, but when I really dig into it, it's hard to wrap my head around. At first it makes sense at the macro level, but [Eoghan Gardiner](#)'s anecdote is at the macro level. After a while it makes my head spin!

Of course, what Cicero loved to do was to find rabbit holes and dig away....

Post by “Cassius” of October 22, 2023 at 5:35 AM

To the extent a diagram like that is showing pleasure and pain to be on an opposite axis then it would be consistent and helpful to explain that the presence of one is the absence of the other.

However to the extent that the diagram implies that "excitement" is on a scale of its own that is unrelated to describing pleasure and pain, it probably detracts from the ultimate philosophical point that if a person is conscious and aware at all, he is feeling either pleasure or pain with no zero / neutral point.

Of course if you follow the descriptions around the circle the point is to read them together and you don't get confused.

I'd say that there's not only no 0,0 point, but none of the points at all marked by the vertical line. If the two lines are "X" and "Y" there's no 0,Y point up and down the circle.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

This aligns with my intuition. But it's difficult to intuit the idea that the absence of pain is the greatest pleasure. It's logically correct, but when I really dig into it, it's hard to wrap my head around. At first it makes sense at the macro level, but Eoghan Gardiner's anecdote is at the macro level. After a while it makes my head spin!

Of course, what Cicero loved to do was to find rabbit holes and dig away...

And yep this is the issue, but (1) there is good reason to believe that the Torquatus portion was coming straight from Epicurean textbooks, and (2) it's essential to point out that the criticism that this perspective is a rabbit hole is the [Ciceronian](#) anti-Epicurean position.

It seems to me the key decision that every reader has to make is to choose from one of these two positions. Either: (1) Torquatus' formulation is a thorough misstatement of Epicurean philosophy, or (2) Torquatus' formulation is correct but appears foreign to our ears because Cicero does not allow Torquatus to include the full explanation of how "absence of pain is the greatest pleasure" arises from a necessary logical deduction, given the inverse relationship of pleasure and pain.

Somebody's going to do a better job than [my chart here](#), but hammering this point is going to be necessary to stop one's head from spinning on what Torquatus is saying.

Words mean something. When you accept (1) that if you are aware of anything at all then what you are aware of is either pleasure or pain, and (2) someone has said that their life is "free from pain," then (3) the realization that what they have said is that they are at maximum pleasure follows like night follows day.

In Eoghan's case I see him following Cicero's wording, which I would discourage, if the implication is that pleasure is associated with excitement / stimulation alone. The wider perspective is that excitement / stimulation is not a required component of pleasure, so it is an incorrect deduction to hold that the level of excitement/stimulation has any relationship to the total percentage of pleasure being experienced.