

Episode 195 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 05

Post by "Cassius" of October 6, 2023 at 2:47 PM

Welcome to Episode 195 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](https://www.epicureanfriends.com), where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we continue our discussion of Books One and Two of Cicero's On Ends, which are largely devoted to Epicurean Philosophy. "On Ends" contains important criticisms of Epicurus that have set the tone for standard analysis of his philosophy for the last 2000 years. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

This week we continue with Book Two. Last week we made a few preliminary comments about it, and this week we will be starting it in earnest at the very end of section II, right before the beginning of section III, on page 32 of the Reid edition, as Cicero claims that Epicurus himself is unsure what pleasure is:

which is beneficial, or that which is pleasing, or that which strikes the fancy merely. Now too, if you have no objection, as you do not altogether reject definition, and practise it when you please, I should like you to define what pleasure is, for 6 our whole inquiry deals with that.' 'Pray,' said he, 'who is there that does not know what pleasure is, or requires some definition to make it plainer?' 'I should proclaim myself to be such a person,' said I, 'but that I believe myself to have a thorough notion of pleasure, and a quite stable idea and conception of it in my mind. As it is, however, I allege that Epicurus himself is in the dark about it and uncertain in his idea of it, and that the very man who often asserts that the meaning which our terms denote ought to be accurately represented, sometimes does not see what this term *pleasure* indicates, I mean what the thing is which is denoted by the term.'

III. Then he said with a smile, 'this is truly an excellent thought, that he who declares pleasure to be supreme among objects of desire, and the final and ultimate good, knows nothing of the essence and attributes of the thing itself!' 'Nay,' said I, 'either Epicurus is ignorant or else all human beings who are to be found anywhere are ignorant what pleasure is.' 'How so?' he said. 'Because all pronounce that thing to be pleasure, by the reception of which sense is excited and is 7 pervaded by a certain agreeable feeling.' 'Well then,' said he, 'is Epicurus unfamiliar with this kind of pleasure?' 'Not always,' I replied, 'for he is now and then too familiar with it, since he avers that he cannot even understand where any good

Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#)

We are using the Reid edition, so check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

As we proceed we will keep track of Cicero's arguments and outline them here:

[Cicero's Objections to Epicurean Philosophy](#)

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57157966>

Post by "Cassius" of October 8, 2023 at 8:07 AM

In addition to the excerpt above to indicate where we will start, I have reformatted into dialogue form the text from which we will be reading, because it seems to me it is super-important. I would suggest the possibility that the name of "[Hieronymus of Rhodes](#)" ought to become almost as familiar to us as any of the core Epicureans, because Cicero points out that he stands for exactly the position that many many commentators today allege to be the position of Epicurus. Nevertheless, Torquatus points out that Hieronymus of Rhodes is "grossly mistaken." I think we are going to find that it is very helpful to be able to understand and express clearly the difference between Hieronymus of Rhodes and Epicurus, which this from Book Two of On Ends allows us to do:

Cicero: "Do you understand, then, what Hieronymus of Rhodes declares to be the supreme good, by the standard of which he thinks all things should be judged?"

Torquatus: "I understand that he holds freedom from pain to be the final good."

Cicero: "Well, what view does this same philosopher hold of pleasure?"

Torquatus: "He asserts that it is not essentially an object of desire."

Cicero: "So he is of opinion that joy is one thing, absence of pain another."

Torquatus: "Yes, and he is grossly mistaken, for, as I proved a little while ago, the limit to the increase of pleasure consists in the removal of all pain."

Cicero: "I shall examine afterwards, what is the sense of your expression absence of pain, but that pleasure means one thing, absence of pain another, you must grant me, unless you prove very obstinate."

Torquatus: "Oh, but you will find me obstinate in this matter, for no doctrine can be more truly stated."

Cicero: "Pray, does a man when thirsty find pleasure in drinking?"

Torquatus: "Who could say no to that?"

Cicero: "The same pleasure that he feels when the thirst has been quenched?"

Torquatus: "No, a pleasure different in kind. For the quenching of the thirst brings with it a steady pleasure, whereas the pleasure which accompanies the process of quenching itself consists in agitation."

Cicero: "Why then do you describe two things so different by the same name?"

Torquatus: "Do you not recollect what I said a little while since, that when once all pain has been removed pleasure admits of varieties but not of increase?"

Cicero: "I do indeed remember, but though your statement is in good Latin, it is far from clear. For variety is a Latin word, and is in its strict sense applied to differences of colour, but is metaphorically used to denote many differences; we speak of a varied poem, varied speech, varied manners, varied fortune, pleasure too is usually called varied when it is derived from many unlike objects which produce pleasures that are unlike. If you intended this by the term variety, I should understand it, as indeed I do understand the word when you are not the speaker; I am far from clear what the variety is of which you speak, when you say that we experience the highest pleasure as often as we are without pain, when however we are eating things which rouse a pleasurable agitation in our senses, then the pleasure consists in the agitation, which produces a variety in our pleasures, but that the pleasure felt in absence of pain is not thereby increased; and why you should call that feeling pleasure, I cannot understand."

Torquatus: "Can then anything be sweeter than to feel no pain?"

Cicero: "Nay, be it granted that there is nothing better, for I am not yet investigating that question; does it therefore follow that painlessness, so to call it, is identical with pleasure?"

Torquatus: "It is quite identical, and is the greatest possible, and no pleasure can be greater."

Cicero: "Why then, when once you have so deigned your supreme good as to make it consist entirely in absence of pain, do you shrink from embracing, maintaining, and championing this exclusively? I ask what need there is for you to introduce pleasure into the assembly of the virtues, like some harlot into a company of matrons? The name of pleasure is odious, disreputable, open to suspicion. So you are in the habit of telling us this, very often, that we do not understand what kind of pleasure Epicurus means. Now whenever I have been told this (and I have been told it not unfrequently) I have the habit of getting now and then a little angry, though I usually bear myself with tolerable calmness in discussion. Do I not understand what hedone means in Greek and voluptas in Latin? Which, pray, of the two languages is it that I do not know? Next, how comes it that I do not know this, though all those are aware of it, whoever they be, that have chosen to become Epicureans? And this is a point argued by your school most admirably, that a man who is to become a philosopher has no need to be acquainted with literature. Thus just as our ancestors brought old Cincinnatus from his plough to make him dictator, so you gather from every village men who are indeed worthies, but surely not very well educated. They then understand what Epicurus means, and I do not?"

Cicero: To let you know that I do understand, first declare that by voluptas I mean what he means by hedone. Now though we often search for a Latin word equivalent to a Greek word and conveying the same sense, in this case there was no need to search. No word can possibly be discovered which more exactly represents in Latin the sense of a Greek word than voluptas. All men everywhere who know Latin denote by this word two things, delight existing in the mind

and a sweet agreeable agitation in the body. In fact the character in Trabea's play describes delight as excessive pleasure in the mind, just like the character in Caecilius, who gives out that he is delighted with all delights. But there is this distinction, that voluptas is applied also to the mind (an immoral feeling, as the Stoics think, who deign it as an irrational elevation of the mind when it fancies itself in the enjoyment of some great blessing) while laetitia and gaudium are not used in connexion with the body. But according to the usage of all who speak Latin, pleasure consists in feeling that kind of agreeableness which agitates some one of the senses. This agreeableness too you may apply metaphorically if you please to the mind; for we use the phrase to affect agreeably in both cases, and in connexion with it the word agreeable; if only you understand that midway between the man who says I am enriched with such delight that I am unsteadied and the man who cries now at last is my heart on fire, one of whom is transported with delight, while the other is racked by pain, comes this man's speech though this our acquaintance is quite recent, for he is neither in a state of delight nor of torture; and also that between him who is master of exquisite bodily pleasures and him who is tormented by the intensest pains comes he who is removed from both states.

Cicero: "Do you think then that I sufficiently grasp the force of expressions, or am I even at my age to be taught to speak either Greek or Latin? And, putting that aside, even granting that I do not clearly comprehend what Epicurus means, though I have, I believe, a clear knowledge of Greek, look to it that there be not some fault in him who uses such language that he is not understood."

Post by "Cassius" of October 8, 2023 at 9:43 AM

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laetitia_\(goddess\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laetitia_(goddess))

Noun[[edit](#)]

laetitia *f* (genitive **laetitiae**); *first declension*

1. [joy](#), [gladness](#), [happiness](#), [pleasure](#), [delight](#) synonyms, antonyms ▲quotations
▼Synonyms: [dēlicium](#), [dēlectātiō](#), [voluptās](#), [gaudium](#), [frūctus](#), [alacritās](#)Antonyms: [maeror](#), [maestitia](#), [aegritūdō](#), [lūctus](#), [trīstītia](#), [trīstītūdō](#), [tristitās](#), [dēsīderium](#)

[laetitia - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

[gaudium - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

Noun[[edit](#)]

gaudium *n* (genitive [gaudiī](#) or [gaudī](#)); [second declension](#)

1. [joy](#), [delight](#) synonyms, antonyms ▲Synonyms: [dēlicium](#), [dēlectātiō](#), [voluptās](#), [laetitia](#), [frūctus](#), [alacritās](#)Antonyms: [maeror](#), [maestitia](#), [aegritūdō](#), [lūctus](#), [trīstitia](#), [trīstitūdō](#), [tristitās](#), [dēsīderium](#)
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Post by “Joshua” of October 8, 2023 at 11:58 AM

In coming to terms with Cicero's loathing for pleasure, I thought of another reason beyond the ones that we have already discussed. We could probably make a list;

- Pleasure directly challenges the Virtues for pride of place among human pursuits. The Virtues are orderly feminine personifications, reinforcing social structure, political security, justice in human affairs, and the goodness in the Roman state religion--Pleasure is the "harlot" as Cicero says, the thief in the night, the enemy at the gates, and the frenzied chaotic Bacchanalia set against the quiet life of sedate *Otium*, the useful, healthful, restorative leisure of the learned Roman aristocrat.
- The pursuit of pleasure signifies weakness, swinishness, and moral decay. Those who pursue it are intellectual eunuchs.

Another reason that occurred to me;

- The pleasure-pain diad, which, its adherents claim, is sufficient to contain all human *pathos*, is offensively reductionist. For Cicero, who sees himself as a dedicated statesman, a skilled rhetorician, a model prose stylist, an adept philosopher, a careful biographer, and a virtuous friend, the reduction of human experience to mere pleasure and pain represents a direct challenge to his own view of himself--he is a polymath; a many-sided man, the prototypical Renaissance man, whose motives are complex. *And will you claim that I, Cicero, am driven by desires and impulses no better than those of an animal!?*
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Post by “Cassius” of October 8, 2023 at 6:04 PM

The listener will have to be the judge of the final product, but I think we had a good recording session today and I think the final product should be a help to our discussions. One comment during early editing:

We talk a lot about how the division of the [principal doctrines](#) is a later and artificial add-on. Here is something that I think will help for this episode as to [PD03](#):

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

In this instance, I am thinking that the conventional numbering tends to minimize the separate and equally important status of the two sentences. I would separate them so that they stand alone:

A: The limit of quantity in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful.

--- That's the sentence you are going to hear from Torquatus over and over and over. But the second in my view makes a separate point:

B: Wherever pleasure is present, as long as it is there, there is neither pain of body, nor of mind, nor of both at once.

--- That's a very important separate point: That not only as established in "A" is the limit of pleasure IN SUM the total absence of pain, but as a second and equally important aspect, IN UNITS of pleasure and pain in discrete areas of our experience, each UNIT is either a pain or a pleasure (and no combination or third alternative) for so long as that unit lasts in that "wherever" area of body or mind. Pleasurable experiences and painful experiences co-exist in different parts of experience like oil and water, but like oil and water they stay separate and do not lose their individual separate nature.

In the discussion featured in this episode, Torquatus continuously stresses point "A." Cicero has allowed Torquatus to state point "B" in Torquatus' prior monologue in Book One.

However when Cicero presses Torquatus on why Epicurus seems to be including two entirely separate things (1- pleasures of stimulation, 2- pleasures of normal living which do not involve stimulation) in his definition of "Pleasure," Cicero allows Torquatus in Book Two - at least in the section we focus on today - to refer only to point "A" as evidence for his position.

As I see it, in truth Epicurus' formulation requires both "A" and "B" for clarity: "in sum" the limit of quantity of pleasure in total is arrived at when all pain is removed, but ALSO, all the way along the sequence of "discrete units," each experience of life which is not painful is seen as pleasurable. You have to have both observations at both summary and unitary levels to understand how "absence of pain" has two meanings: One in sum as the limit of quantity, and one in discrete unitary experiences that go to make up that sum.

If true, this observation would mean that both sentences in the form we have them in [PD03](#), which are not stated explicitly in the Letter to Menoecus, have to be fully developed and understood before the passages in Menoecus about pleasure -- which lead some to an ascetic interpretation of Epicurus -- can be fully appreciated as not saying that at all.

Let's see how this plays out in the podcast.

Post by “Godfrey” of October 8, 2023 at 9:09 PM

Well stated [Cassius](#) ! 👍 👍

Post by “Cassius” of October 8, 2023 at 10:04 PM

Episode 195 of Lucretius Today is Now Available! We cover a lot of material that is very important to several recent discussions, so I wanted to get this out as quickly as possible.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57157966>

Post by “Cassius” of October 8, 2023 at 10:19 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Well stated Cassius !

Thank you Godfrey. This point plays a significant point in this episode 195, so if you get a chance to listen and comment I will be very interested.

Post by “Martin” of October 9, 2023 at 3:57 AM

The quote below from comment #5

Quote

As I see it, in truth Epicurus' formulation requires both "A" and "B" for clarity: "in sum" the limit of quantity of pleasure in total is arrived at when all pleasure is removed, ...

should be:

"As I see it, in truth Epicurus' formulation requires both "A" and "B" for clarity: "in sum" the limit of quantity of pleasure in total is arrived at when all **pain** is removed, ...

Post by “Cassius” of October 9, 2023 at 7:00 AM

DUH! thank you Martin!!!

Post by “Godfrey” of October 9, 2023 at 3:38 PM

In trying to understand Hieronymus' assertion that the absence of pain is not pleasure, the only way that it makes sense to me is if there's a neutral state dividing pleasure and pain. A neutral state does exist according to Cicero, but it would seem that he's ignoring it here in the interest of obfuscation.

Great discussion in this episode! 👍👍

Post by “Cassius” of October 9, 2023 at 6:07 PM

Godfrey:

I am thinking that these guys are being ruthlessly logical. Hieronymus of Rhodes has for whatever reason identified "Freedom from pain" to be the ultimate good (maybe Hieronymus

really WAS obsessed with escaping pain as all that matters to him, as Epicurus is *alleged* to be?) Since Hieronymous does not equate "pleasure" with "freedom from pain," he excludes "pleasure" from his goal and says it is not necessary.

In contrast as to Epicurus (and if I could record again I would stress this point harder) I am now convinced that Epicurus is saying BOTH of these two points:

"A" - The "limit of pleasure" is exactly the same as and can be called interchangeably "the absence of pain." ALSO:

"B" - Any discrete feeling of "pleasure" is exactly the same as and can be called interchangeably a feeling of "absence of pain." Likewise, if desired, any discrete feeling of "pain" is exactly the same as and could be called interchangeably a feeling of "absence of pleasure."

I think we should be reading Epicurus as being ruthlessly logical, and realizing that he had to bring the normal state within the term "pleasure" for philosophical discussion. You therefore end up with people like Torquatus, and Epicurus in the letter to Menoecus, speaking in terms that sound like (and are, to an extent) a mathematical equivalency:

"Pleasure" = "Absence of Pain" and "Pain" = "Absence of Pleasure."

In the past I would have said that Epicurus was equating them in terms of "Quantity" only, as per the first part of [PD03](#). I would have stressed that Epicurus was not saying that "Pleasure" is the equivalent of "Absence of Pain" in every respect, just "quantity."

Now I would say that my prior interpretation did not go far enough. I would now say that Epicurus is simply redefining the terminology and saying that the terms are interchangeable, because there are only two feelings and the presence of one is the absence of the other, period.

The reason I can embrace this equivalency is I think it is also clear from numerous references in Epicurus and Torquatus this does not lead to a woo-woo definition of absence of pain as something other than or higher than pleasure. The first part of [PD03](#) just gives us the "goal" in terms of "the sum of our experience" -- the theoretical goal being to reach 0% painful experiences which literally means 100% pleasurable experiences.

The second part of [PD03](#) gives us the rest, which is that life is lived as a combination of discrete experiences (even "feeling happy" at a particular moment is a discrete experience) and when we refer to discrete feelings, we can label the desirable ones as either "pleasure" or "absence of pain" and mean exactly the same thing with either term.

To me this is validated by concluding that it is obvious to us (as it would have been to Epicurus) that the step from 99% pleasure/absence of pain to 100% pleasure/absence of pain is absolutely not a difference in kind, but only in degree. No "practical" person in his right mind

would suggest that in climbing a mountain, there is no benefit from approaching within a foot of the summit, and that only at the very last inch of the summit is the benefit of mountain climbing realized. The benefit of being within a foot of the summit is essentially indistinguishable from being at the very point of the summit.

You could extend that analogy forever: No practical person in his right mind would suggest that in climbing a ladder, there is no benefit from being on the next to the last rung, and that only when you position yourself on the very last rung does climbing a ladder have any benefit. The benefit of being on the next-to-last rung is essentially similar in every practical respect to being on the highest rung.

No practical person in his right mind would suggest that in dining at a banquet there is no benefit from eating the first delicacy in front of you, and that only after you have eaten delicacies to the point of being stuffed does eating delicacies have any benefit. The benefit of eating each delicacy along the way until you are close is essentially similar in every practical respect to having eaten the last delicacies to the point where you are full.

No one of reasonable mind would conclude that reaching the very summit of the mountain or the top rung of the ladder or being close-to-full of delicacies at a banquet means that every step or bite along the way has been worthless and should be discarded. No MORE steps up the mountain or the ladder or bites of food are needed, but the ones you have taken already are an essential and necessary part of whatever it is that you have accomplished.

Unless Hieronymous was a dedicated ascetic viewing pleasure as evil to be avoided at all costs (maybe he was a proto-Stoic) he was committing the grossest error in denying that pleasure is not a requirement and the same as freedom from pain. So while Hieronymous and Epicurus both were comfortable with embracing "freedom from pain" as a statement of the supreme good, their definitions of what "freedom from pain" really means are so dissimilar as to make a night and day difference.

And in conclusion let's go ahead and be "obstinate" and validate two of Cicero's criticisms:

(1) As to terminology, "Pleasure is the absence of pain" is a key insight that Epicureans naturally keep repeating even if it drives Cicero batty that it has two meanings (first as to the sum or limit, and second as to discrete feelings). If it makes Cicero angry, so what? (I see this as another example of the in-your-face approach, such as "*the sun is the size it appears to be.*")

(2) Regardless of whether it is immodest to say it, Epicurus was wise about the supreme good, and Hieronymous was a fool. If it is being immodest to take a firm position on what is wise and what is not wise in regard to pleasure, then taking a firm position is just what Epicurus was doing, and it seems to me that he is telling us to do the very same thing.

Here's the text again for quick reference:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Cicero: "Do you understand, then, what Hieronymus of Rhodes declares to be the supreme good, by the standard of which he thinks all things should be judged?"

Torquatus: "I understand that he holds freedom from pain to be the final good."

Cicero: "Well, what view does this same philosopher hold of pleasure?"

Torquatus: "He asserts that it is not essentially an object of desire."

Cicero: "So he is of opinion that joy is one thing, absence of pain another."

Torquatus: "Yes, and he is grossly mistaken, for, as I proved a little while ago, the limit to the increase of pleasure consists in the removal of all pain."

Cicero: "I shall examine afterwards, what is the sense of your expression absence of pain, but that pleasure means one thing, absence of pain another, you must grant me, unless you prove very obstinate."

Torquatus: "Oh, but you will find me obstinate in this matter, for no doctrine can be more truly stated."

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Post by "Cassius" of October 9, 2023 at 6:17 PM

Another key question, Godfrey:

If "pleasure" = "absence of pain," does that mean that all pleasures are the same, and it makes no difference to us which pleasures we experience in life?

My answer would be:

Of course it does NOT mean that!

Pleasures (and pains) differ in intensity, duration, and location. Cites for that proposition would include [PD09](#) + the common experience of everyone.

The pleasures of sitting on the floor of a cave chanting to yourself are quite different from the pleasures of flying to the moon in a rocket with your best pals.

No one with any degree of intelligence would allege that those pleasures are the same, but no one has the inherent authority to substitute their judgement of what is pleasing for those of another person. Some people may in fact find their ultimate fulfillment in life in sitting in a cave chanting. I am not such a person, and I doubt most of us in this forum are such people either. If we don't make more of our lives than that, then we will feel psychological pain of missing out on pleasure that was within our reach at reasonable cost but which we failed to seize.

You can view it in terms of different people having different estimates of pleasure and pain, or in other ways, but it would be ludicrous to suggest that all pleasures are the same and that it makes no difference to us which we choose to pursue in life.

In general, "we want to pursue choices that produce the life for us that is most completely full of pleasure," which means exactly the same thing as that "we want to pursue choices that produce that life for us that is most completely devoid of pain." Once you understand the equivalency then you are fine, but under conditions in which "absence of pain" first evokes in the person you are speaking to visions nihilistic nothingness, then you need to explain what you are saying in full.

Post by “Joshua” of October 9, 2023 at 6:31 PM

As I listen to the episode, I begin to realize that we were very nearly describing the hedons and dolors of Utilitarianism--units of unmixed pleasure and pain. While in any given moment one can experience both pleasure and pain, a particular feeling is either pleasureable or painful.

I'm not sure this is a useful path to go down, but it's probably worth addressing because I can see this being a source of confusion given the differences between Epicurean philosophy and Utilitarianism.

Post by “Cassius” of October 9, 2023 at 6:55 PM

I am unfamiliar with the details of Bentham and utilitarianism so I can't comment too much except to say that my problem with Utilitarianism has always been that I believe "the greatest good for the greatest number" is a terrible way of looking at things in sum.

I can't believe that Epicurus would agree that "the greatest number" is a desirable way of ranking an ultimate goal, but it may be that along the way the Utilitarians had aspects of their thought that was closer to that of Epicurus.

Apparently Frances Wright thought so.

If someone has expertise or wants to read up then we can eventually start or renew a Utilitarianism comparison thread -- I think we have one already...

Indeed we do:

[Epicurean Philosophy vs. Utilitarianism](#)

Post by "Godfrey" of October 9, 2023 at 8:29 PM

So, to paraphrase [PD03](#):

"In terms of an entire organism, the maximum pleasure is the absence of pain throughout the organism. In any part of the organism, any degree of pleasure removes all pain in that part for as long as it is there, because pleasure is equal to the absence of pain."

Post by "Cassius" of October 9, 2023 at 8:37 PM

Godfrey I think that is creative and makes a lot of sense. Someone might ask if the "entire organism" includes the mind and I think the answer to that would be "of course."

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

"In terms of an entire organism, the maximum pleasure is the absence of pain throughout the organism. In any part of the organism, any degree of pleasure removes all pain in that part for as long as it is there, because pleasure is equal to the absence

of pain.

Post by “Cassius” of October 9, 2023 at 8:46 PM

As to the question: "Should an organism be satisfied with a low degree of pleasure that in fact drives out all pain when a higher degree of pleasure exists and is available to the organism that would also drive out all pain?"

What would you say to that?

Or is that impossible due to the first sentence of your restatement? Do we come back to the issue of location, intensity, and duration? How do we integrate the two perspectives (whole organism vs individual experiences) more clearly?

Post by “Cassius” of October 9, 2023 at 8:59 PM

"Full" is a term that applies equally to a jar whether the size of the jar is pint, quart, or gallon. But an organism is alive and can perhaps expand or contract its "size" in a way that may be relevant to this conversation?

In other words how do we look at "the full organism" in a way that accounts for the desirability of not simply accepting the "minimum pleasure" that is available to it immediately at hand?

Is there something about the nature of a human or intelligent being that leads to pain if the organism does not seek out the pleasure that is available to it?

What is the most clear way of explaining "This is why you don't just accept the food and water and shelter that is readily at hand, and why you instead educate yourself and work to add to the amount of pleasure that you experience in your life?"

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

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

"In terms of an entire organism, the maximum pleasure is the absence of pain throughout the organism. In any part of the organism, any degree of pleasure removes all pain in that part for as long as it is there, because pleasure is equal to the absence of pain

So to restate my question, I think this is significant advance in explaining what "absence of pain" is intended to mean. But there still remains a "degree" question as to why a baby whose day is 100% pleasure should wish to live another day, much less live to adulthood. There is another aspect of identifying what we mean by "the entire organism" that must explain that point. Something relating to the lifespan and/or natural capacities of the organism.

Post by “Godfrey” of October 9, 2023 at 9:14 PM

Technically, having the absence of pain throughout your body and mind is the fullest pleasure. Practically, I'm not sure that I've ever experienced that! Maybe when I was a baby?

In any part of the organism, once all pain is gone you can experience increasing pleasure in that part, at least until the increased sensation causes pain. So, interestingly, the maximum pleasure of the entire organism is the absence of pain, whereas the absence of pain is the minimum of pleasure for any specific location in the organism.

This explains the interaction of intensity, location and duration. The location of the minimum pleasure in every location throughout the organism is considered a greater pleasure than the most intense pleasure in a few parts of the organism. Practically speaking, this provides some guidance for maximizing pleasure through working with all three of the components instead of just the component of intensity.

(oops, we cross posted)

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

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

So, interestingly, the maximum pleasure of the entire organism is the absence of pain, whereas the absence of pain is the minimum of pleasure for any specific location in the organism

Yes as to the first part before the comma, but I am not sure that our definition of pleasure as absence of pain necessarily leads to the part after the comma. Perhaps this is where the "quantity" issue comes in, with quantity being relevant differently at the macro vs the micro levels. Maybe quantity applies at the macro level but at the micro level that is where you have duration, intensity, and location?

Maybe duration intensity and location are not relevant at the macro / full level? (Maybe I should say the macro/full perspective.)

Does that involve the Diogenes Laertius statement that there are two types of happiness/pleasure, one at the god level and one capable of increase and decrease?

"They say also that there are two ideas of happiness, complete happiness, such as belongs to a god, which admits of no increase, and the happiness which is concerned with the addition and subtraction of pleasures."

Post by "Don" of October 9, 2023 at 11:34 PM

At the risk of interrupting a very important and interesting thread in this conversation, I personally found this line intriguing:

Quote from "Torquatus" in Reid translation

'No, a pleasure different in kind. For the quenching of the thirst brings with it a steady pleasure, whereas the pleasure which accompanies the process of quenching itself consists in agitation.

These two:

1. a steady pleasure
2. [pleasure consisting] in agitation.

Sound to me exactly like the categories of katastematic (a steady pleasure) and kinetic (agitations) pleasure.

In fact, Rackham comes right out and translates the phrases that way:

[Quote from "Torquatus" in Rackham translation](#)

"No, it is a different kind of pleasure. For the pleasure of having quenched one's thirst is a 'static' pleasure, but the pleasure of actually quenching it is a 'kinetic' pleasure."

I think this again show the importance that Epicurus and later Epicureans insisted on using these categories to clearly show the all-encompassing spectrum of pleasure that their philosophy insisted upon.

Post by "Godfrey" of October 10, 2023 at 2:34 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe quantity applies at the macro level but at the micro level that is where you have duration, intensity, and location?

I've actually been wondering for a while if magnitude/quantity was describing the same thing as condensing/intensity, but I think you're going in a better direction. Here's my latest thinking:

Magnitude/quantity simply comprises intensity, location and duration. This can occur at any intensity at any location for one moment, or at many locations for a long period of time. The limit of the magnitude/quantity is the absence of pain throughout the organism, for the life of the organism. But, practically speaking, we can work with intensity, location and duration of individual pleasures (through reasoning about our desires and comparison with our experiences of pleasure and pain) in order to maximize the pleasures available to us. This is exactly what Epicurus did on his deathbed: there wasn't much physical pleasure available to him, so he maximized his mental pleasures, through recollection of his most intense pleasures, in the time that he had left.

A question is "why is absence of pain throughout the organism (macro) the limit of magnitude, whereas a more localized pleasure (micro) can increase beyond mere absence of pain?"

- Macro pleasure, by definition, can't increase in location. A micro pleasure can.

- Can macro pleasure can increase in duration? Or is it specifically "godlike"? A micro pleasure can increase in duration.

- Can a macro pleasure increase in intensity? Epicurus is apparently saying that it cannot, that it's limit is the absence of pain. From experience it seems that a micro pleasure can increase in intensity.

- Intensity the actual Feeling of pleasure or pain, right. Location and duration are simply where and when that Feeling occurs.

Is there something special about intensity at the macro v the micro level? Is Epicurus' description of the limit of magnitude/quantity as a type of homeostasis? Could the latter case be a situation where there are no pains anywhere, ever, to overcome so that there is no need to pursue a pleasure in one place to offset a pain in another place?

Post by "Cassius" of October 10, 2023 at 5:17 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

A question is "why is absence of pain throughout the organism (macro) the limit of magnitude, whereas a more localized pleasure (micro) can increase beyond mere absence of pain?"

I think we could reword that this way:

A question is "why is absence of pain (which is the definition of pleasure) through the organism (at macro level) the limit of magnitude, whereas a more localized pleasure (at the micro level) can increase?"

If that is saying the same thing, which I think it is, the answer is pretty obvious: a macro level pleasure cannot increase by definition. because it has no more room to increase, while pleasure at any smaller degree than macro level can increase because it still has room to increase.

I am not sure this is any more difficult than remembering "positive, comparative, superlative" as parts of speech.

In "good, better, best" the "good" gives you a description of what you are talking about, the "better" is the comparative form distinguishing one from another, and the "best" is by definition the superlative form which you are saying cannot (again by definition) increase.

I am thinking words like "full" and "complete" and "pure" and "godlike" are meant as superlatives and simply being used to refer to the "best" possible.

And I think these issues we're discussing are the primary and important big picture items to get clear first.

Secondarily we have the kinetic/katastematic issue as Don has interjected I think correctly as "types" or categories of pleasure that are included in the sweeping mix as descriptions that involve manner of experience. As differences involving manner of experience those are useful to consider but i don't see them as words expressing comparatives or superlatives of Pleasure as the general category. You can use and need both. They are types of pleasure like mental vs bodily or hearing vs seeing or long-lasting vs short, but I don't see them as being evaluated as better or best types of Pleasure, which is the big complaint I have against the usual K/K analysis. I would say both are "good" types of pleasure (all types of pleasure being "good") but their relative contribution toward one's total experience can increase and decrease with circumstances as part of making up the total organism over its lifetime. Many types of trees can make up a forest, but what we want to talk about in general terms as a way of evaluating the best way of life (the way we want to set as our goal) is the "forest" level. If we expend our entire conversation on "what about elms?" and "what about poplars?" and "what about oaks?" and "what about pines?" etc etc then we lose our focus on discussing "what about the forest as a whole?"

Post by “Don” of October 10, 2023 at 7:12 AM

Oh, and great discussion in 195! Well done! Looking forward to more Cicero dissection.

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 7:34 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Oh, and great discussion in 195! Well done! Looking forward to more Cicero dissection.

Ok I am glad we pass that test, 😊 because I am pretty sure we want to add 195 to the list of "most important" episodes.

Post by “Don” of October 10, 2023 at 8:26 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As differences involving manner of experience those are useful to consider but i don't see them as words expressing comparatives or superlatives of Pleasure as the general category. You can use and need both.

Fully agree!

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 10, 2023 at 8:44 AM

I wanted to quickly drop in to this thread to say that this episode has brought up some questions for me - regarding the use of the word "pleasure" in every-day speech.

I personally feel that I want to start using more words, and different words, which are more accurate for each and every given situation.


The word pleasure can encompass so much, however in my mind and perhaps others who speak English, the word pleasure is used to apply to sensations that have a certain intensity and stimulate the senses. (Perhaps other languages/nationalities have a different understanding than American/British people. For example, in France they might say "It's a pleasure to meet you" - but in the USA we would never say that.)

So then more accurately we would say that the goal of Epicureans is to seek out pleasing experiences, pleasantness, and also pleasures (sensations) - what is agreeable, pleasant, and pleasurable. When it comes to mental pleasure we say "enjoyable" or "pleasant".

Post by “Don” of October 10, 2023 at 9:29 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

For example, in France they might say "It's a pleasure to meet you" - but in the USA we would never say that.


 LOL. I say that all the time.


Post by “Kalosyni” of October 10, 2023 at 9:34 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

For example, in France they might say "It's a pleasure to meet you" - but in the USA we would never say that.

 LOL. I say that all the time.

Perhaps you are French? lol  (So then I guess I am incorrect in my understanding regarding the frequency of this usage).


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


[Quote from Kalosyni](#)


[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

For example, in France they might say "It's a pleasure to meet you" - but in the USA we would never say that.

 LOL. I say that all the time.

Perhaps you are French? lol  (So then I guess I am incorrect in my understanding regarding the frequency of this usage).

I will admit I started to use it with more frequency over the last few years... Can't think of a reason why 

Post by “Joshua” of October 10, 2023 at 10:24 AM

Yeah, I do hear that greeting in the Midwest. I probably say it myself from time to time, though I'm not sure. We'll have to ask [kochiekoch!](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 10, 2023 at 12:24 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I will admit I started to use it with more frequency over the last few years... Can't think of a reason why 😊

Perhaps you are meeting more interesting people these days!

As for myself I seem to say "Nice to meet you".

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 8:06 PM

Godfrey to continue on this part of the discussion in an admittedly narrow and technical way rather than making a super important point, I wanted to make another comment on your statement here:

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

So, interestingly, the maximum pleasure of the entire organism is the absence of pain, whereas the absence of pain is the minimum of pleasure for any specific location in the organism.

I made a comment on this already, but here is something more about considering any interpretation of "absence of pain" as a "minimum":

From section IV of Book Two (again I am rewording to make it clear who is speaking so check the original:

Torquatus: 'Can then anything be sweeter than to feel no pain?'

Cicero: "Nay, be it granted that there is nothing better, for I am not yet investigating that question; does it therefore follow that painlessness, so to call it, is identical with pleasure?'

Torquatus: 'It is quite identical, and is the greatest possible, and no pleasure can be greater.'

11 IV. 'Can then,' my friend said, 'anything be sweeter than to feel no pain?' 'Nay,' I said, 'be it granted that there is nothing better, for I am not yet investigating that question; does it therefore follow that painlessness, so to call it, is identical with pleasure?' 'It is quite identical, and is the greatest possible, and no pleasure can be greater.' 'Why then, I

Presuming that last sentence is translated correctly, and I have no reason to doubt it, this is another explicit statement that the Epicurean position is that:

1 - "Painlessness"/ "Absence of Pain" is IDENTICAL to pleasure. I interpret that to mean that the two concepts ("absence of pain" and "pleasure") are two separate words being used to describe exactly the same thing, meaning that the two words can be used interchangeably in referring to an individual discrete feeling.

2 - That using the term 'painlessness" or "pleasure" without any modifiers or caveats can also imply that you are referring to pleasure at the "macro" or "whole organism" level and therefore you are referring to "pure pleasure" which by definition means the "greatest pleasure," "no pleasure being greater."

My point in this post is that i am cautious in the wording so we can try to track the Epicurean usage. If you refer to a person, or a person refers to themselves at the moment, as being "painless," then that seems to be the equivalent of saying that they are at the height of pleasure in both body and mind as a full organism. If you refer, on the other hand, to some part of your body as being painless (such as hand or foot or your mind) then you are just referring to a location and saying nothing about the rest of the body or mind, which could be experiencing pain at the same time.

So I am cautious about referring to "painless" as a starting point. A painless foot and hand and adding them up is a good start, yes, but "painlessness" at the macro full organism level is apparently being defined as being 100% full of pleasure and a very great pleasure. Now maybe "variation" can explain this in a way consistent with "starting point," but I'm not sure that's consistent with the texts.

Maybe in the discussion of variation we'll find more to go on as to that aspect.

Post by “kochiekoch” of October 10, 2023 at 8:10 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Yeah, I do hear that greeting in the Midwest. I probably say it myself from time to time, though I'm not sure. We'll have to ask kochiekoch!

"It's a pleasure to meet you"?

Usually something like "nice meeting you". Could be regional. 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of October 10, 2023 at 8:21 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think we could reword that this way:

A question is "why is absence of pain (which is the definition of pleasure) through the organism (at macro level) the limit of magnitude, whereas a more localized pleasure (at the micro level) can increase?"

If that is saying the same thing, which I think it is, the answer is pretty obvious: a macro level pleasure cannot increase by definition. because it has no more room to increase, while pleasure at any smaller degree than macro level can increase because it still has room to increase.

Sorry for disappearing... busy day!

Yes, that rewording of the question is the same thing.

The last paragraph in [Cassius](#) ' quote shows that, yet again, I wasn't clear enough in my overall analysis above. As far as it goes, what is presented in this paragraph *is* obvious. The components of location and duration obviously cannot increase at the macro level, but they can at the micro level.

What's not obvious to me is the role of intensity. If intensity can increase at the micro level beyond the absence of pain, why can it not increase at the macro level? Or is intensity the wrong description of this component of pleasure? Is it really just a two way switch that jumps from pleasure to pain? If this is the case, then the three components are feeling, location and

duration. If so, "feeling" describes both the composite of the three components *and* one of the components, in which case I think it's a better description to say that pleasures and pains vary through the modifiers of location and duration, and avoid the word "intensity". Which might actually be the way the Greek texts are written: at least in [PD09](#), I've been understanding (as has at least one translator) "condensed" to be equivalent to varying intensity.

I don't have a problem with that, and that might be exactly the conclusion from [PD03](#) and [PD09](#). This means that what is perceived as "intensity" is, in fact, an increase or decrease (condensing) in location and/or duration. My general sense is that I can increase the intensity of a pleasure or pain without increasing the location or duration. Is that actually incorrect? If one was to dig into the science, is a nerve ending (if that's the correct term) an on-off switch? Imagine a pleasure or pain resulting from a pressure. Does increasing the pressure simply recruit more nerve endings (increase the location) rather than elicit a greater response from the original quantity of nerve endings? If I'm getting this right, that seems to be what Epicurus intuited and what he based his conception of maximum pleasure on.

Am I making a comprehensible presentation? If so, does it make any sense?

(Cross posted again...)

Post by “Godfrey” of October 10, 2023 at 8:31 PM

[Cassius](#), my post just now and your last post (which cross-posted) are talking about the same problem, I think. Just approached slightly differently....

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 8:32 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

What's not obvious to me is the role of intensity. If intensity can increase at the micro level beyond the absence of pain, why can it not increase at the macro level

Godfrey I think we crossposted but we were thinking about the same subject. It seems to me that "absence of pain" is not terminology that can be improved at either macro level or when referring to a particular location.

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 8:48 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

If intensity can increase at the micro level beyond the absence of pain, why can it not increase at the macro level

This sentence I think cannot be correct as to "absence of pain" at the micro level. Describing relative intensity between pleasures requires more qualifiers it seems like, because even though "absence of pain" seems to be identical with pleasure, "absence of pain" seems to always be used to describe a top limit while "pleasure" seems usable in ways that can be more or less strong.

If they are identical terms it would seem that they could be used interchangeably, but apparently not. Maybe there is a clue in "usage" which Cicero starts talking about in the same section as with words referring to variety and gladness

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 8:52 PM

While I am sure that there is a rational explanation that makes all this clear, as I said in the podcast I have to agree with Cicero that there is something going on here with the terminology which is not obvious and requires an explanation. We need to complete the circuit by incorporating duration intensity and location just as you are trying to do in order to complete the "General Theory of Epicurean Pleasure."

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 8:54 PM

Godfrey I don't recall that you commented on "why accept the minimum when more is possible" and I suspect that is key to completing this analysis. There is some aspect to "Intensity" that fits into this puzzle. More intensity has to be obviously desirable just like it is obvious that you want the most duration and locations.

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 9:00 PM

The phrase from the letter to Meoceus that we don't want the longest life but the "most pleasurable" certainly is relevant, but something has to show that it isn't sufficient to fill 100% of our locations and durations with sitting in a cave staring at the wall. That intuitively is not sufficient but if accepted would make intensity irrelevant - just as expanding any one of the three exclusively would make the other two irrelevant.

Duration, location, and intensity must have some kind of natural status of importance that requires consideration of all three.

Post by "Cassius" of October 10, 2023 at 9:07 PM

My first suggestion would be consideration of the opening of Lucretius - Pleasure is not just a "reaction to events" but is a guiding and leading and motivating force that is programmed not randomly but in an evolutionary way to improve, and not to accept a minimum when more can be obtained. Else pleasure would never have led living things down the path of evolution to where we are today.

Is a constant drive to greater duration, location and intensity inherent in pleasure itself?

To repeat myself, it must be true that greater duration, location, AND intensity of pleasure are inherently desirable.

The precise apportionment between the three might be a matter of personal preference but the three still have some kind of priority status in the analysis over other considerations.

Post by "Cassius" of October 10, 2023 at 9:24 PM

Quote

[PD09](#). If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted, and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another"

Is it possible that one inference to take from this is that variety in pleasures IS desirable, and that we should not seek to let any of the three factors take over exclusively, even though

variety does not take the amount of pleasure past its theoretical limit?

With the final unstated clause not being "but they do" but being instead "and you should not want them to or try to make them."

We seem to presume that Epicurus would disagree with "Variety is the spice of life" but maybe he *would* agree with that, and this PD is embracing variety because Epicurus sees the advantage in all three aspects?

Post by “Godfrey” of October 10, 2023 at 9:35 PM

I'm thinking that [PD03](#) and [PD09](#) are keys to solving this puzzle, although I haven't looked at other of Epicurus' writings in this regard. For the record, I don't think that the answer will be found in Cicero although the answer should explain what Cicero is saying about pleasure.

[PD03](#):

“The magnitude [intensity??] of pleasures is limited by the removal of all pain. Wherever there is pleasure [location], so long as it is present [duration], there is no pain either of body or of mind or both.” Hicks (1910)

“The limit of quantity [intensity??] in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever [location] pleasure is present, as long as it is there [duration], there is neither pain of body nor of mind, nor of both at once.” Bailey (1926)

[PD09](#):

“If every pleasure were condensed [intensity?], if one may so say, and if each lasted long [duration], and affected the whole body, or the essential parts of it [location], then there would be no difference between one pleasure and another.” Yonge (1853)

“If all pleasure had been capable of accumulation [intensity], if this had gone on not only in time [duration], but all over the frame or, at any rate, the principal parts of man's nature [location], there would not have been any difference between one pleasure and another as, in fact, there now there now is.” Hicks (1910)

“If every pleasure could be intensified [intensity] so that it lasted [duration] and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature [location], pleasures would never differ from one another.” Bailey (1926)

As I recall, [Don](#) interpreted [PD09](#) as saying that pleasure cannot be condensed (by analyzing Epicurus' counterfactuals. Based on our most recent posts I think this could be saying that there

is no component of intensity. There is only the feeling of pleasure/pain, it is a two-way switch, and it varies in magnitude only through location and duration.

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 9:38 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

There is only the feeling of pleasure/pain, it is a two-way switch, and it varies in magnitude only through location and duration.

At least at the moment I would definitely resist that interpretation. There's no doubt some interesting terminology going on here, and maybe that's one possibility, but it seems intuitive to me that when Epicurus talks about not wanting the longest but "the most pleasant" he is talking about more than "location."

Post by “Godfrey” of October 10, 2023 at 11:59 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

[PD03](#) “The limit of quantity [intensity??] in pleasures is the removal of all that is painful. Wherever [location] pleasure is present, as long as it is there [duration], there is neither pain of body nor of mind, nor of both at once.” Bailey (1926)

Paraphrase: "The most pleasure that one can experience is the removal of all pain, throughout one's body and mind, for the duration of their life. This maximal pleasure comprises pleasures which occur in various parts of one's body and mind and at various times, to such an extent that they fill the entirety of the person's body and mind for the duration of their life." [PD03](#)

Is this a correct paraphrase of [PD03](#)? If so, why? If not, why not?

Quote

[PD09](#) “If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another.” Bailey (1926)

Paraphrase: "If any pleasure could be extended for the duration of the life of a particular organism and extended throughout the body and mind of the organism, this pleasure would be the same as any other pleasure so extended." [PD03](#)

Is this a correct paraphrase of [PD09](#)? If so, why? If not, why not?

We experience pleasures as differing from one another, so what does this mean? How do the pleasures differ from one another besides in location and duration? Are extension, accumulation, condensing, intensification, all describing the same thing? What is that thing? Reading the sentence, does the thing apply only to the location and duration of the pleasure, or to the pleasure itself? How does this thing relate to the maximal pleasure in [PD03](#)?

Post by "Godfrey" of October 11, 2023 at 12:05 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Godfrey I don't recall that you commented on "why accept the minimum when more is possible" and I suspect that is key to completing this analysis. There is some aspect to "Intensity" that fits into this puzzle. More intensity has to be obviously desirable just like it is obvious that you want the most duration and locations.

Minimum what? As long as all pain is gone from the body and mind, there is no minimum because you are by definition at the maximum of pleasure (macro). If we're talking about micro pleasures, then the minimum would mean that you're limiting yourself to one location of pleasure or to one moment of pleasure. Once pleasures have accumulated throughout your body and mind, you're at the maximum of pleasure.

It would appear that there's no sliding scale of intensity, other than through location and duration, by definition. At least That's what I'm thinking right here, right now. That may change.



Post by "Godfrey" of October 11, 2023 at 12:12 AM

Other thoughts on variation....

External sources of pleasure have uncountable variety. Internal experiences of pleasure seem to be confined to location, duration and possibly intensity. How does the variety of external pleasures equate to variety of internal experiences? Is it through location, in that different nerve endings or neurons are stimulated by different stimuli? If you eat one cherry, then another and another, are you increasing the intensity of stimulation at each nerve ending or are you stimulating an increasing number of nerve endings?

At that, my neurons are overstimulated. Peace out.

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2023 at 3:30 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

It would appear that there's no sliding scale of intensity, other than through location and duration, by definition. At least That's what I'm thinking right here, right now. That may change.

Me too as to out for a while. But before I go:

Dropping back for a moment, if there are only two of a thing being discussed, then the presence of one = absence of the other and the highest possible absence of one is the highest possible presence of the other, full stop. That's all you need to know to say that in any such situation that if one is totally absent, the other is totally present. You don't need any information whatsoever about duration, location, or intensity whatsoever if you are told a person is "without pain" to know that he is in "total pleasure." So that intellectual formulation can't be violated and you are going to stick with it with the tenacity of Torquatus and you are never going to admit an exception, because of the way you have defined the terms and held that there are only two possibilities.

At the same time, in real life, no matter what your intellectual classification scheme, the senses are able to pick up differences of duration, location, and intensity of sensation.

Recall that Epicurus himself notes that some feelings are more acute than others in [PD04](#): Pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh.

You're not going to abandon your classification scheme, in which every experience is deemed pleasurable unless it is painful. But you also aren't going to ignore the different sensory information that the senses are providing. When you are dying with very great kidney pain you

aren't going to offset that pain with thinking about how you trimmed your fingernails this morning, but only with a very great pleasure.

So you have to be able to incorporate both levels of perspective in a general theory of pleasure and pain if you're going to be persuasive that your theory has validity.

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2023 at 3:55 AM

To consult DeWitt's perspective on this if we choose to, we are probably talking about the section entitled "Unity of Pleasure" starting page 232, which includes this below, which incorporates the k/k distinction as a reference to "intensity." Dewitt seems to be suggesting that the same type of feeling of pleasure or pain is being considered acute / intense / kinetic if experienced over a short time and is being considered less acute / less intense / katastematic if experienced over a longer time:

Quote

To substantiate this drift of reasoning it is not impossible to quote a text: "The stable condition of well-being in the flesh and the confident hope of its continuance means the most exquisite and infallible of joys for those who are capable of figuring the problem out."

This passage marks a distinct increase of precision in the analysis of pleasure. Its import will become clear if the line of reasoning already adumbrated be properly extended: let it be granted that the escape from a violent death is the greatest of joys and the inference must follow that the possession of life at other times cannot rank greatly lower.

Similarly, if the recovery from a dangerous illness be a cause for joy, manifestly the possession of health ought to be a joy at other times. Nevertheless the two pleasures differ from one another and it was in recognition of the difference that Epicurus instituted the distinction between kinetic and static pleasures. The difference is one of intensity or, as Epicurus would have said, of condensation. At one time the pleasure is condensed, at another, extended. In other words the same pleasure may be either kinetic or static. If condensed, it is kinetic; if extended, it is static.

There is a catch to this reasoning, however; it holds good only "for those who are

capable of figuring the problem out:' This marks Epicurus as a pragmatist, insisting upon the control of experience, including thought. His reasoning about kinetic and static pleasures is sound, but human beings do not automatically reason after this fashion; they fail to reason about the matter at all. Although they would spontaneously admit the keenest joy at recovery from wounds or disease. they forget about the blessing of health at other times. Hence it is that Epicurus insists upon the necessity of being able to reason in this way. Moreover. this reasoning must be confirmed by habituation. The same rule applies here as in the case of "[Death is nothing to us:](#)' It is not enough to master the reasons for so believing; it is also necessary to habituate one's self to so believe. This is pragmatism.

Under this view it looks to me like you are definitely acknowledging differences in intensity of pleasures and pains, so you are not being unrealistic and acting as if that difference is not there, but you are mentally conditioning yourself to view them as similar in nature because this mental perspective allows you to appreciate whichever you have under a particular circumstance.

"And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided.

[130] Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good. And again independence of desire we think a great good — not that we may at all times enjoy but a few things, but that, if we do not possess many, we may enjoy the few in the genuine persuasion that those have the sweetest pleasure in luxury who least need it, and that all that is natural is easy to be obtained, but that which is superfluous is hard. And so plain savours bring us a pleasure equal to a luxurious diet, when all the pain due to want is removed; and bread and water produce the highest pleasure, when one who needs them puts them to his lips.

[131] To grow accustomed therefore to simple and not luxurious diet gives us health to the full, and makes a man alert for the needful employments of life, and when after long intervals we approach luxuries disposes us better towards them, and fits us to be fearless of fortune."

So of course you are going to engage in "sex, drugs, and rocknroll" when you can do so without experiencing more pain than pleasure, but if for any reason you are not able to engage in them without causing yourself more pain than pleasure, you are going to have no reason to regret your choice to decline because you can make up for that declined pleasure by finding

compensating pleasure in other activities. The focus of your decisionmaking is always on maximizing the predominance of pleasure over pain in total, and you aren't inherently favoring intense over non-intense or non-intense over intense. You're just picking a mix between the two that under your circumstances will produce the greatest pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2023 at 7:06 AM

Time for some Gosling & Taylor. I think this is consistent with most all of what we have said in this thread so far:

Page 347

Quote

18.1.4 In other words, the experience of pleasure is experience of its goodness. Indeed for consistency with his theory of knowledge Epicurus must be able to give a perceptual basis for judgments of value if he is to claim that they can be known. This is sometimes construed as though pleasure were a feeling attached to a perception. The word 'pathos' which Epicurus uses to categorize pleasure and pain, means, rather, a way of being affected.

Thus according to Diogenes '(X.34), the Epicureans say that there are two paths that occur with every living thing, pleasure and pain. One might be tempted to think that there are also others, e.g. a Platonic neutral state. But Epicurus allows of no midway between the two: pleasure is defined as the absence of pain. Not, of course, that any absence of pain (e.g. death) is pleasure, but any painless conscious life is a pleasure, where, we must remember, life would not consist simply in being alive, but in living the kind of life characteristic of the species. So with sentient beings there are just two ways in which in their sentient activity they can be affected: painfully or pleasurably, the first being aversive, the second appetitive.

So every perception involves being affected in one or other of these ways and in such perception a sentient being grasps the value or disvalue of being so affected, a grasp that is, at a pre-logical level, constituted by acceptance or aversion. Clearly the whole bias of this way of thinking will be to make the goodness of each particular pleasure obvious in each perception. There will be no temptation to make the value of pleasure maximization over a life obvious to perception.

Nor will any need be felt to appeal to Eudoxan observations as to how human beings argue about the worth of things, what questions they do or do not ask, still less to argue from premisses that suppose that there are other goods than pleasure. If a judgment of worth can be known to be true then it must be possible to refer to some value given in perception to substantiate it, and the only answer can be that it contains pleasures, for anything else can only be judged good in so far as it yields this. If now we are to compare lives it can only be by some comparison of pleasantness, and anyone who makes a judgment about the worth of a life is making a judgment that can only be substantiated by reference to its pleasantness, which can only be judged in the last resort by the person who lives it. There is room for argument as to what form of life is pleasantest, but no room at all for discussion as to what makes something good.

This sentence, I think, helps with the question of why not sit in the dark staring at a candle: "

"Not, of course, that any absence of pain (e.g. death) is pleasure, but any painless conscious life is a pleasure, where, we must remember, life would not consist simply in being alive, but in living the kind of life characteristic of the species."

Post by "Cassius" of October 11, 2023 at 7:12 AM

Here Gosling and Taylor introduce katastematic and kinetic, which they then devote a separate chapter later to explaining why they are both pleasure and katastematic is not the ultimate goal. But for now:

Quote

18.1.5. When it comes to assessing various degrees of pleasantness, Epicurus seems to have thought that pleasures are of two sorts, those of change (kinetic) and those of stable condition (katastematic) and perhaps that either sort could be primarily bodily or mental. (DL X.136, 144). Those associated with motion seem to be those which accompany a change from pain to its removal, whereas those of a stable state are those of conditions where pain is absent, and with it any cause of change (DL X.128-9). Quite generally, pleasures cannot increase in degree beyond the point of removal of pain (PD 3; DL X.139). With bodily pleasures this limit is reached when the need that is causing pain is removed. Mental pain is largely caused by such things as grief and fear, and so is only to be removed by reflections on the sources of these emotions (PD 18;

DL X.144). In either case there is no possibility of increase past the point of the removal of pain, only of variation. There is no need, therefore, to get into complexities of comparative intensities or other methods of assessing the comparative pleasantness of different activities. A life free from pain ipso facto wins over one not so free.

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2023 at 7:28 AM

Always good to bring in a comparison with the Cyreniacs (also Gosling & Taylor):

18.3.6. (iii) But this brings us to the third problem. For Epicurus should not be prepared to allow that one unmixed pleasure can be greater than another. The ‘greater than’ relation can only hold between pairs of pleasures at least one of which is mixed, it cannot hold between two unmixed ones. So this at least looks like a fairly blatant inconsistency.

18.3.7. The only hope here is to query the testimony of Diogenes, but it clearly will not do simply to dismiss it because it is awkward. Two things are, however, worth noting: first, although Diogenes (DL X.136, 137) sounds as though he is reporting an explicit set of disagreements with the Cyrenaics, he is probably only working out divergencies, and secondly, when the point at present under discussion is introduced the dispute is over whether physical or mental pains are worse; it is only after an explanation of why Epicurus thought mental ones were worse that Diogenes adds that for the same sort of reason he thought that mental pleasure were greater.

Now the Cyrenaics dismissed the idea of calculating the effects of actions and advocated pursuing the immediately available pleasure. So far as immediately available pleasures were concerned they considered bodily ones to be the greater, presumably judging degrees of pleasure on a scale of intensity. Since pleasure is the only good, and this does not mean pleasure maximization over a life, they are obviously going to think that bodily pains are worst and bodily pleasures best just because most painful and pleasurable respectively. One would not, however, expect Epicurus to settle the question of which were better in these terms (DL X.129-30). He would not deny, perhaps, that some bodily pains are very intense, and even more intense than any mental ones, but he thought that intense bodily pain was always short-lived and that therefore one should not make much fuss about it (PD 4; DL X.140). For, in such pain the body has only to cope with the present disorder, which is only of brief duration. The mind, by contrast, dwells on not only present evils but past and future ones as well, and so its pain endures as long as the memory and expectation of evil. These are also typically fertile of pain. The memory of past failure leads to fear of future ones in turn aggravated by memories of past ones. So the body’s limitation to its present condition in contrast to the mind’s wandering

over past, present, and future would make one, on Epicurean grounds, consider the pains of the mind to be worse, and this is precisely the ground cited by Diogenes in X.137.

But this is, note, a ground for considering them worse, not in any ordinary sense as more painful. Epicurus' disagreement with the Cyrenaics would be precisely on the point of equating what is more painful with what is worse. It is only after his reports of the Epicurean grounds for thinking mental pains to be worse that Diogenes comments that 'so in this way he holds that the pleasures of the mind are also greater'. But 'this way' has given no grounds for supposing them greater in the sense of more intense, nor pleasanter in any sense found elsewhere in Epicurus. At most it gives grounds for supposing them more enduring and more productive of pleasure. It is simplest in fact, either to suppose that 'greater' does not mean 'more pleasant', or to suppose that this has slipped in because of carelessness on the part of Diogenes who was constructing a dispute in which Epicurus' 'opponents' were using 'greater' as equivalent of 'more pleasant' and taking greater pleasures as ipso facto better. Either way Epicurus is not committed to saying that mental pleasures are pleasanter than bodily ones, though he will doubtless say that unmixed mental ones are pleasanter than mixed bodily ones. So the probability is that the basis of Diogenes' report is quite consistent with Epicurus' remarks elsewhere on degrees of pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of October 11, 2023 at 7:55 AM

Underlining added by me:

Quote

18.3.17 - Once again, living a life free of disturbance is not just a matter of staying alive and not being disturbed, as with a person under heavy sedation, but living the sort of life specific to the being in question. Epicurus could concede to Plato that there are states of living things which are neither pleasant nor painful, as for instance, states of unconsciousness, but he would not concede to the subtlers of the [Philebus](#) that once the process of coming-to-be had finished the pleasure was over. Faced with the problem which it was suggested faced Plato after the Republic (cf. 6.8) Epicurus refused to make a choice. Granted we have a conscious living thing, then he seems to have thought, if it is living its specific form of life that life will be pleasant except to the extent that the proper balance is disturbed. In pleasures of restoration the condition of the organism is not entirely disrupted. To the extent that it approximates to proper balance there will be pleasure, (for to that extent some of the imbalance will have been removed and some balance restored), but the pleasure will be perfect only when the balance is. Having a physicalist view of the constitution of man he will be very inclined

to some view of the good state as consisting in a physical balance of the organism, but he has no inclination to follow Plato or Aristotle in their views of the exquisite pleasure of philosophy. There is nothing special about the mind in this respect and indeed, un-Platonically, its main value is not in the divine glory of the intellect, nor its special pleasantness, but in its contribution to the general stability of the system. In some ways this has an Aristotelian ring: if one is living according to one's nature then one is enjoying one's life, and failure of enjoyment is a function of disrupted nature. But Epicurus' physicalism makes him stick firmly by physical balance, and this in turn makes him less interested in individual activities and their enjoyments, which gets Aristotle embroiled with external goods (cf. 13.4.3-4), and more in a condition of the individual which ensures him balance independently of external circumstance.

Post by "Don" of October 11, 2023 at 1:26 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Quote

[PD09](#). If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted, and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another"

Is it possible that one inference to take from this is that variety in pleasures IS desirable, and that we should not seek to let any of the three factors take over exclusively, even though variety does not take the amount of pleasure past its theoretical limit?

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

Yes, I would say variety is desirable. At the very least, we can say that pleasures (αἱ ἡδοναί is plural) do differ from each other.

Quote from Cassius

With the final unstated clause not being "but they do" but being instead "and you should not want them to or try to make them."

I'm not sure I'm onboard with your addition to the "unstated" clause. The unstated clause is very helpful in getting across the grammatical construction that conveys the counterfactual. Yours actually adds new content. I'm not quite sure what you're getting at with "and you should not want them to or try to make them." Is that commentary directed at those who elevate tranquility?

Post by “Don” of October 11, 2023 at 1:41 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Paraphrase: "The most pleasure that one can experience is the removal of all pain, throughout one's body and mind, for the duration of their life. This maximal pleasure comprises pleasures which occur in various parts of one's body and mind and at various times, to such an extent that they fill the entirety of the person's body and mind for the duration of their life." [PD03](#)

Is this a correct paraphrase of [PD03](#)? If so, why? If not, why not?

As the start to a response, here's my clunky literal translation:

"The limit of the magnitude of pleasure (is) the whole of the removal of that which causes pain. Where that which gives pleasure exists, during the time it is present, there is neither pain nor that which causes pain in body or mind nor either of these together."

You included "for the duration of their life." I don't think that's implied in the PD. I think it's more important to focus on "during the time it is present." We can have the kind of pleasure outlined in PD3 momentarily or longer, but we're not guaranteed to have it, a mortal beings, "for the duration" of our lives. Even Epicurus didn't have that kind of pleasure "for the duration" off his life. Diogenes Laertius's commentary comes to mind: "Two sorts of happiness 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."

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2023 at 3:46 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Yours actually adds new content. I'm not quite sure what you're getting at with "and you should not want them to or try to make them." Is that commentary directed at those who elevate tranquility?

Not necessarily taking aim at tranquility at this point, just trying to focus on whether it might be important to get a better fix on "variety." Is "variety" in pleasure the reason we find it is desirable to get out of bed tomorrow? Or is the reason just that we didn't succeed in making "pure pleasure" today so that we try again tomorrow?

There's something going on that explains better why we both (1) don't need infinite time, and yet (2) find it desirable to live another day tomorrow. Yes "life is desirable" is a statement that we can refer to, but there's also some intellectual connection between why pure pleasure (should we attain it) cannot be improved, and yet we do want to live again tomorrow if there is more pleasure and pain that comes from it.

There needs to be a simple way to state the reason other than "Epicurus said life is desirable."

Here's two things I think are pretty simple once you get with the terminology issue:

(1) It's pretty simple to see that when you talk about the whole organism (and I think that probably includes time as a component, but maybe not) being "full" of pleasure / without any pain / experiencing pure pleasure" is a height which cannot be exceeded no matter how much additional time is added.

(2) And it's pretty easy to understand that if there are only two labels for feelings, then any particular feeling could be called either "pleasure" or "absence of pain" if it feels good, or "pain" or "absence of pleasure" if it feels bad.

I would think there must be an equally simple way of dealing with a question such as: "If your view of the goal is (1), and you reach it one day, why do you want to live another day?"

It's one thing to say that (1) is the "ideal" and we just do the best we can to approximate it every day, and not worry about it further. That may be the complete answer, and we think of (1) as something the gods can attain but we cannot, because what we can attain is a preponderance of pleasure over pain all the time.

But lots of people seem to ask what Epicurus says about "How long should you want to live?" combined with "Why not settle for the least active life you can so as to minimize pain?" and it would be desirable to answer that as clearly and concisely as possible.

Perhaps some of the Gosling and Taylor commentary about "living the sort of life specific to the being in question" helps in that direction. But whether it does or not it's a question you'll be asked as soon as you start taking questions from your local Epicurean Meetup Group so it's good to plan ahead. 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of October 11, 2023 at 8:37 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Is "variety" in pleasure the reason we find it is desirable to get out of bed tomorrow? Or is the reason just that we didn't succeed in making "pure pleasure" today so that we try again tomorrow?

I don't necessarily think that either or these is the reason to get out of bed, although in a particular instance they could be. One thought is that pleasure is something that we're attracted to, so any pleasure may get us out of bed: a beautiful day outside, the smell of coffee, the anticipation of some activity that awaits.

Another thought is that desire, not desire, is the reason to get out of bed. The desire to relieve a full bladder, to drink a cup of coffee, to accomplish such-and-such. Experiencing pleasure may actually keep you in bed: enjoying the sun shining through the window in your bedroom, the pleasure of anticipating some future event, etc. It could be a desire for variety, or a desire to achieve pure pleasure today.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I would think there must be an equally simple way of dealing with a question such as: "If your view of the goal is (1), and you reach it one day, why do you want to live another day?"

This gets back to the Cyrenaic view of pleasure. As I recall, they thought that there was no lasting pleasure so that as soon as you reached your goal and satisfied one desire for a pleasure, you had to then satisfy another desire for pleasure. This also points out an issue with goal setting in general which is being discussed in some circles these days: once you reach your goal, what do you do? Instead, some writers recommend developing a habitual process of moving forward toward achieving what is important to you.

Too, pleasure is able to increase in duration, so if you reach your maximum of pleasure one day, you can still increase it by continuing it for another day.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"living the sort of life specific to the being in question"

Any properly functioning being has an innate drive to pleasure/health/vitality, which I assume would drive it/them naturally to get out of bed and do stuff, if able.

Post by “Cassius” of October 11, 2023 at 9:30 PM

Typo here Godfrey, or am I misreading the "desire, not desire"?

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Another thought is that desire, not desire, is the reason to get out of bed. The desire to relieve a full bladder, to drink a cup of coffee, to accomplish such-and-such.

Post by “Godfrey” of October 11, 2023 at 9:55 PM

Typo. Desire, not pleasure... 😬

Post by “Don” of October 11, 2023 at 10:16 PM

When I have these thoughts about getting up in the morning, I sometimes think that I have the decision to stay in bed. Would this ultimately lead to more pleasure and pain? I would lose my job. My marriage would suffer. I wouldn't have any money to do the things I desire to do.

So, the decision to get up is a classic choice/rejection decision to me. I have the personal responsibility to get out of bed or not. I make the decision to get up the vast majority of days, unless I'm sick or the basement's flooded or some other responsibility that can't be ignored. Again, do I leave the house and ignore the problem. That would be indeed lead to more pain in the long run!

Post by “Don” of October 11, 2023 at 10:33 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

just trying to focus on whether it might be important to get a better fix on "variety." Is "variety" in pleasure the reason we find it is desirable to get out of bed tomorrow?

Technically, and to be purely pedantic and nit-picky, PD9 doesn't say anything about the desirability of a variety of pleasures. It merely states the fact that pleasures do differ from each other.

I think it's important to realize then that PD9 is followed by [PD10](#) which talks about the "pleasures of the profligate." It seem to me the juxtaposition is saying something like "Yes, pleasures do differ from each other. You can't just lump all pleasures together - even though all pleasures feel good to us. Look at the pleasures of the profligate. They are experiencing pleasure, but are those pleasures washing away the mind's fears about astronomical phenomena and death and suffering, and furthermore teaching us the limits of our pains and desires? They are not. This is why some pleasures - even though good - are not choiceworthy because they lead to more pain. etc." The variety is another reason pleasures can be choiceworthy or not. We can decide among pleasures because they do differ from each other in their source, their effect, their consequences.

That's my take on PD9, 10, and 11.

Post by “Cassius” of October 12, 2023 at 7:44 AM

To sort of recap for a moment let me say this:

My major issue with the "absence of pain" analysis I see discussed by many modern commentators is that they either state or imply that there is some kind of "true pleasure" or "higher pleasure" that is the ultimate goal of life which is only experienced when every last drop of pain is eliminated. As a result they imply that the ordinary experience of pleasure in normal life as you get your life under control and gradually increase the predominance of pleasure in your experience from 50% to 75% to 90% to 99% ultimately is worthless, and that nothing is worth achieving until you cross that 100% pleasure / 0% pain threshold.

To coin a new term that no one has ever used before 😊 - that interpretation would make "the perfect the enemy of the good."

As I would say it now, PDO3 is making clear BOTH:

1 - That the theoretical goal is 100% pleasure / 0% pain, because it's obvious nothing can be more complete than 100%. When looking at your whole life "in sum," the logical goal for your

life as a whole is 100% pleasure / 0% pain. Of course we know it is canonical Epicurus that we sometimes choose pain when that leads to more pleasure or less overall pain, so the 100% / 0% goal is a "whole organism" perspective, and not an inflexible rule that says at every moment that your "prime directive" is to make sure you never experience a moment of pain. You look to all the consequences and you act accordingly.

2 - That every step along the way, in any discrete moment / part / feeling / experience of your life, what you are feeling / experiencing is registered as either pleasure or pain, and that there is no "neutral" or third or fourth or any other kind of experience that does not fall under pleasure or pain. If you are not feeling pain, what you are feeling is pleasure, full stop, end of need to look for any other high-level label. Any feeling that we find to be desirable is equally describing as "pleasure" or "absence of pain" at this high level of analysis.

If those two points are accepted as clear, I think you eliminate most of the ill effects of all the "woo" that surrounds absence of pain, and you end up with a very practical and common sense framework that refutes all the ascetic or esoteric assertions that people who are averse to the word "pleasure" want to push. Accepting these two points as core Epicurus fleshes out what Epicurus is talking about in the letter to Menoecus and makes clear he is not pointing in an ascetic direction, and that he has no intention of "writing out" the pleasures of "stimulation" from within the proper and full definition of pleasure, which includes both stimulation and all other activities of normal life which are not painful.

There's a lot further we can go in terms of practical advice and additional details, such as linking statements to the effect that life is desirable and that is a small man indeed who has many reasons for ending his life. We can then develop a similarly clear statement on the issue of being satisfied with what you have while at the same time wanting to continue living so long as you can expect a predominance of pleasure over pain.

But if points 1 and 2 above are not clear, I don't think it's productive to move further until we have confidence in those two.

Any thoughts?

Post by "Don" of October 12, 2023 at 8:38 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the 100% / 0% goal is a "whole organism" perspective, and not an inflexible rule that says at every moment that your "prime directive" is to make sure you never experience

a moment of pain.

That sounds to me like an echo of the Stoic "if you're not 100% virtuous all the time, you're crap." I seem to remember they say you can still drown an inch below the surface of the water. Maybe people are mapping a Stoic perspective on an Epicurean idea?

Post by “Cassius” of October 12, 2023 at 11:19 AM

I think your comment is on target - and I think that Frances Wright agreed with you and devoted a significant amount of her fictional reply of Epicurus to Zeno on the same point:

[Quote from A Few Days In Athens Chapter 7](#)

But, perhaps, though Zeno should allow this last effect of my philosophy to be probable, he will not approve it: his severe eye looks with scorn, not pity, on the follies and vices of the world. He would annihilate them, change them to their opposite virtues, or he would leave them to their full and natural sweep. ‘Be perfect, or be as you are. I allow of no degrees of virtue, so care not for the degrees of vice. Your ruin, if it must be, let it be in all its horrors, in all its vileness; let it attract no pity, no sympathy; let it be seen in all its naked deformity, and excite the full measure of its merited abhorrence and disgust.’ Thus says the sublime Zeno, who sees only man as he should be.

Thus says the mild Epicurus, who sees man as he is: — With all his weakness, all his errors, all his sins, still owning fellowship with him, still rejoicing in his welfare, and sighing over his misfortunes; I call from my gardens to the thoughtless, the headstrong, and the idle — ‘Where do ye wander, and what do ye seek? Is it pleasure? Behold it here. Is it ease? Enter and repose.’ Thus do I court them from the table of drunkenness and the bed of licentiousness: I gently awaken their sleeping faculties, and draw the veil from their understandings: — ‘My sons! do you seek pleasure? I seek her also. Let us make the search together. You have tried wine, you have tried love; you have sought amusement in reveling, and forgetfulness in indolence. You tell me you are disappointed: that your passions grew, even while you gratified them; your weariness increased even while you slept. Let us try again. Let us quiet our passions, not by gratifying, but subduing them; let us conquer our weariness, not by rest, but by exertion.’ Thus do I win their ears and their confidence. Step by step I lead them on. I lay open the mysteries of science; I expose the beauties of art; I call the graces and the muses to my aid; the song, the lyre, and the dance. Temperance presides at the repast;

innocence at the festival; disgust is changed to satisfaction; listlessness to curiosity; brutality to elegance; lust gives place to love; Bacchanalian hilarity to friendship. Tell me not, Zeno, that the teacher is vicious who washes depravity from the youthful heart; who lays the storm of its passions, and turns all its sensibilities to good. I grant that I do not look to make men great, but to make men happy. To teach them, that in the discharge of their duties as sons, as husbands, as fathers, as citizens, lies their pleasure and their interest; — and when the sublime motives of Zeno shall cease to affect an enervated generation, the gentle persuasions of Epicurus shall still be heard and obeyed.

Post by “Joshua” of October 12, 2023 at 6:12 PM

Quote

That sounds to me like an echo of the Stoic "if you're not 100% virtuous all the time, you're crap." I seem to remember they say you can still drown an inch below the surface of the water. Maybe people are mapping a Stoic perspective on an Epicurean idea?

This claim about Stoicism comes from Cicero; I didn't look very hard, but I didn't find the same claim in other Stoic texts from the ancient world.

Quote

“For just as a drowning man is no more able to breathe if he be not far from the surface of the water, so that he might at any moment emerge, than if he were actually at the bottom already ... similarly a man that has made some progress towards the state of virtue is none the less in misery than he that has made no progress at all.” (De Finibus, IV.48)