

Pleasure is the Ultimate Good but a Pleasant Life is the Goal

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 10, 2023 at 9:17 AM

I am thinking about how we define things and how it affects cognition. Also, definitions are dependent upon the given situation (context) and must be tied down to practical matters. And what is the purpose of defining things and gaining clarity of the way things are unless it all can be placed into a system for living a good life (and has some therapeutic benefit)?

The word "pleasure" can be a catch-all word but there is too much ambiguity in it.

We generally (at first glance) think that the word "pleasure" is describing something sensual - food, drink, beautiful sights, smells, and touch (a warm bath, back massages, or sex).

There is also a category of "the joys of life" - and many people would consider such moments as the birth of their children, or gatherings/celebrations (or reunions) with family and friends, as being in this category.

Then there are "the simple joys of life" - rituals of going for a morning walk, reading a book, playing with one's children or pets, etc.

And there are "enjoyments" - which are mental pleasures (instead of saying "mental pleasure" we can say "enjoyments") and it is when we consider that something was more enjoyable than painful that we say: "I enjoyed _____(xyz)."

If we think of a life that has more pleasures than pains (physical) and more enjoyments than agitations (mental), we would likely define it as a **pleasant life** - and that is what we are aiming for. And we could say that a pleasant life is a "happy" life. (Happy and happiness also need more words to define them in whatever context they arise in).

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 10, 2023 at 9:30 AM

Also we tend to think in chunks of time, perhaps according to seasons (summertime, holiday time or "over the past year", etc.) or based on when significant events happened (moving to a new city, getting married, or birth of a child, etc).

Then given this reference to what ever chunk of time we are reflecting on, we then might have a quick sense of whether things have been going well or not. And then the cognition of either one of the following: -- a mix of ups and downs -- or feeling a bit unhappy -- or feeling generally happy -- or things have been going very well.

I would say that as Epicureans our goal would be to think (and be able to honestly say) that things have been going very well -- and that this would be a pleasant life (and a happy life). And likely we re-evaluate according to new chunks of time, as time moves forward.

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 11:33 AM

Anytime we start talking in terms of a "life" or implying "length of time" is an issue I think we need to remember this from the letter to Menoecus:

[126] But the many at one moment shun death as the greatest of evils, at another (yearn for it) as a respite from the (evils) in life. (But the wise man neither seeks to escape life) nor fears the cessation of life, for neither does life offend him nor does the absence of life seem to be any evil. And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant.