

A Food Analogy That May Be Useful In Thinking About Stimulative vs Non-Stimulative Pleasures

Post by "Cassius" of March 6, 2024 at 9:53 AM

Epicurus gives an analogy in the Vatican Sayings that I'd like to speculate about:

VS37. Nature is weak toward evil, not toward good: because it is saved by pleasures, but destroyed by pains.

What I am about to say is far from a perfect analogy to VS37, but I think it might be meaningful for those of us who are constantly reading about health and diet. Unfortunately I don't have time for a long post with lots of cites so I will stick to what I think is strictly non-controversial.

1. In order to be strong, our bodies need energy.
2. Energy can come either from "carbohydrates" or "fat/protein."
3. Both sources of energy appear to have important uses.
4. The body stores fat/protein and burns fat/protein when carbohydrates are not present.
5. People can experience "sugar highs" from carbohydrates, but (unless I missed the article) there are rarely if ever "fat-highs or protein-highs."
6. It's obvious where this would go:
7. Stimulative pleasures analogize to our bodies burning the carbohydrates / sugars that we find so stimulative pleasing when we eat them.
8. Non-stimulative pleasures analogize to burning the stored fat/protein (fat first) in the body during which we can function just as well as from carbohydrates, but this energy arises from the natural healthy operation of our bodies. In fact it happens either through mentally sticking to a low-carb diet or simply not having the option of carbohydrates, and not from the stimulative addition of food in the form of the carbohydrates that we can find so addictive but also damaging if overused.
9. Both types of bodily processes (burning carbohydrate and burning fat/protein) are normal and natural and meet separate needs.
10. Carbohydrates in nature are not always available (in older times, mainly in spring and summer when fruits were available). Fats/proteins are "always" available, either through burning our stored excess fat/protein, or from killing and eating animals, which themselves store fat/protein.
11. Our natures are "saved by pleasures" but "destroyed by pains" analogizes to that we need pleasure like energy from food. Pleasure can come from stimulative or non-stimulative pleasures, and energy can come from burning carbohydrates or it can come from burning fat/protein. The selection between the two is largely a matter of circumstances and keeping the two options in a balance that leads the body as a whole to

- be healthy and strong.
12. No reasonable person thinks that carbohydrates are "bad in themselves" unless they are misused. No rational person thinks that fat or protein are "superior" forms of energy in themselves, because there are many benefits from consuming foods that contain both.
 13. No reasonable person would argue that carbohydrates are included under the term "food" but that fat/protein is not, nor would they argue the reverse, or that the term "food" contains only one type or the other. Both types are food, just like both types of pleasure are pleasure.
 14. No reasonable person thinks that we consume carbohydrates because the "goal" of our bodies is to produce fat and protein. Likewise, no reasonable person should think that "stimulative" pleasures are in themselves better or worse than "non-stimulative pleasures. Both are required for healthy living.
 15. The goal of our bodies is to live a healthy life, which requires a healthy total relationship between carbohydrates and fat and protein. The goal of a philosophically-correct person is to live a happy life, which requires that pleasures are always found to be available either from stimulative or non-stimulative sources, adding up to a total picture in which pleasures predominate over total pains.
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Post by “Novem” of March 19, 2024 at 1:22 AM

I've started to reincorporate carbs back into my diet after years of trying to do super low-carb high-protein/fat diet, but I am mindful of what carbs I consume. Bringing back carbs has helped me lose weight I think because my cells have that energy they can easily use at first and a calorie deficit overall to let them dig into my fat stores. I've also gone vegetarian and embraced plant protein and that has helped me lose weight. I avoid some highly processed carbs and plant protein sources, and I eat pasture-raised eggs. I still do eat some low-carb items like zero-carb wraps because they are lower in calories overall and the high fiber helps regulate hunger and carbs too.

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 19, 2024 at 8:50 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Our natures are "saved by pleasures" but "destroyed by pains"

Thinking more correct to say: destroyed by excessive and unnecessary pains.

Important to remember the Letter to Menoecus says:

"...we pass up many pleasures when we will gain more of what we need from doing so. And we consider many pains to be better than pleasures, if we experience a greater pleasure for a long time from having endured those pains. So every pleasure is a good thing because its nature is favorable to us, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen — just as every pain is a bad thing, yet not every pain is always to be shunned." (...since we are also aiming for health of the body and happiness of the soul).

Post by “Pacatus” of March 27, 2024 at 6:56 PM

I've been thinking lately about the sequential nature of this: What if I indulge in a pleasure now that may result in some pain after – but calculate that the resulting pain (say, feeling over-full after a delicious meal) will be less than the pleasure indulged (say, the taste-pleasure of the meal – one more bite of delicious fare)? Does the pleasure/pain calculus only run one way sequentially?

Post by “Godfrey” of March 27, 2024 at 9:07 PM

I don't think that sequence matters much. The calculus is more of a cost - benefit analysis: is x amount of pleasure worth y amount of pain? Will z amount of pain produce a pleasure greater than z?

Post by “Joshua” of March 27, 2024 at 9:17 PM

The other question is one of risk; if I take risk x, it may provide both mild immediate pleasure and mild immediate pain, but the rest of the calculus is marked by an unavoidable ambiguity. The risk could either result in pleasureable success y, or painful failure z. Unlike a hangover, neither eventuality is easily predictable.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 27, 2024 at 11:25 PM

Another way to think about a particular risk is to examine it using the categories of desire. If it's unnatural, that would suggest that the consequences are probably not worth the effort. If it's natural, that may narrow the possible consequences somewhat.

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 28, 2024 at 12:23 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Unlike a hangover, neither eventuality is easily predictable.

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

feeling over-full after a delicious meal) will be less than the pleasure indulged (say, the taste-pleasure of the meal – one more bite of delicious fare)?

It really depends on if this is a very rare occurrence or a regular habit. After a year of "one more bite" you may have gained 10 lbs. and then if that feels painful enough (pants are too tight to button) then you will have to implement a plan to create a calorie deficit ... i.e. ...a diet (which can be painful). You can't "cheat" with calories - nature will take its course if you eat more calories than you burn.

Also, if you look at the Letter to Menoecus, it sheds some light on this matter:

"And because this is the primary and inborn good, we do not choose every pleasure. Instead, we pass up many pleasures when we will gain more of what we need from doing so. **And we consider many pains to be better than pleasures, if we experience a greater pleasure for a long time from having endured those pains.** So every pleasure is a good thing because its nature is favorable to us, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen — just as every pain is a bad thing, yet not every pain is always to be shunned. It is proper to make all these decisions through measuring things side by side and looking at both the advantages and disadvantages, for sometimes we treat a good thing as bad and a bad thing as good."

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

Does the pleasure/pain calculus only run one way sequentially?

So according to this you only endure pain if it leads you to "experience a greater pleasure for a long time from having endured those pains".

So I would say that the "one more bite" runs contrary to what is said in Letter to Menoecus.

Also we have the Vatican Saying 59: "The stomach is not insatiable, as most people say; instead the opinion that the stomach needs unlimited filling is false."

And Vatican Saying 68: "Nothing is enough to one for whom enough is very little."

These almost have a bit of a harsh tone, but worth considering in the choice calculus.