

Episode 222 - Revisiting the Relationship Between Happiness and Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of April 3, 2024 at 3:56 PM

Welcome to Episode 222 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most 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, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we will pause in our reading of Book Two of Cicero's On Ends to take stock of recent conversations, as Joshua is away this week and we have with us our friend Don from the EpicureanFriends.com forum. Don has spent a lot of time looking into the various Roman and Greek words used by the ancients to discuss happiness and pleasure, and we will try to bring that to bear on the logical sparring such as the one we focused on last week, raised by Cicero at the beginning of Section XXXII. Here's the way Cicero put it:

XXXII. But to return to our theme (for we were speaking about pain when we drifted into the consideration of this letter) we may now thus sum up the whole matter: he who is subject to the greatest possible evil is not happy so long as he remains subject to it, whereas the wise man always is happy, though he is at times subject to pain; pain therefore is not the greatest possible evil.

...

Cicero continues:

But when you maintain that the mental pleasures and pains are more intense than those of the body, because the mind is associated with time of three kinds, while the body has only consciousness of what is present, how can you accept the result that one who feels some joy on my account feels more joy than I do myself? But in your anxiety to prove the wise man happy, because the pleasures he experiences in his mind are the greatest, and incomparably greater than those he experiences in his body, you are blind to the difficulty that meets you. For the mental pains he experiences will also be incomparably greater than those of the body. So the very man whom you are anxious to represent as constantly happy must needs be sometimes wretched; nor indeed will you ever prove your point, while you continue to connect everything with pleasure and pain.

So what we are going to do today is drop back and see if we can do what Torquatus is not allowed to do by Cicero - to "prove our point" that Epicurus' positions on the basics of happiness, pleasure, and pain make much more sense than those advocated by Cicero and the non-Epicurean schools of the classical world.

Some of the questions we will talk about today include:

1. Did Epicurus hold that Pain is properly thought of as the ultimate or Chief Evil, and how do we make sense of that statement? Is there a particular type of Pain that is the Chief Evil?
2. Did Epicurus hold that the Happy Man can still be Happy while experiencing tremendous pain while at same time holding that pain can be the chief evil? If so, how do we make sense of that?
3. Is it Happiness which is being described by Torquatus when he said earlier that the wise man always has more reason for joy than for vexation? ([62] XIX. But these doctrines may be stated in a certain manner so as not merely to disarm our criticism, but actually to secure our sanction. For this is the way in which Epicurus represents the wise man as continually happy; he keeps his passions within bounds; about death he is indifferent; he holds true views concerning the eternal gods apart from all dread; he has no hesitation in crossing the boundary of life, if that be the better course. Furnished with these advantages he is continually in a state of pleasure, and there is in truth no moment at which he does not experience more pleasures than pains. For he remembers the past with thankfulness, and the present is so much his own that he is aware of its importance and its agreeableness, nor is he in dependence on the future, but awaits it while enjoying the present; he is also very far removed from those defects of character which I quoted a little time ago, and when he compares the fool's life with his own, he feels great pleasure. And pains, if any befall him, have never power enough to prevent the wise man from finding more reasons for joy than for vexation.)
4. Can we look to Epicurus on his last day as an example that is equivalent to the wise man being tortured, and are they both to be considered Happy? If so, why?

If we have time, we will probably incorporate into the discussion a number of the other excerpts we have been reading recently, including:

1. **Diogenes of Oinoanda Fr. 32** ... [the latter] being as malicious as the former. I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now. If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. **But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?»**, I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, **that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues**, which are inopportunately messed about by

these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end. Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

2. **Cicero On Ends 1:54 (XVI) RACKHAM** - If then even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on pleasure, whereas pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that **a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.** REID: But if the encomium passed even on the virtues themselves, over which the eloquence of all other philosophers especially runs riot, can find no vent unless it be referred to pleasure, and pleasure is the only thing which invites us to the pursuit of itself, and attracts us by reason of its own nature, then there can be no doubt that of all things good it is the supreme and ultimate good, and that **a life of happiness means nothing else but a life attended by pleasure** .
3. **Epicurus 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 ."*
4. **Epicurus Letter to Menoeceus** : *"By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul."*
5. **Diogenes Laertius X-34** : *"The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined."*
6. **On Ends Book One, 30** : *"Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?"*
7. **On Ends Book One, 38** : *Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension."*
8. **On Ends Book One, 39** : *For if that were the only pleasure which tickled the senses, as it were, if I may say so, and which overflowed and penetrated them with a certain agreeable feeling, then even a hand could not be content with freedom from pain without some pleasing motion of pleasure. But if the highest pleasure is, as Epicurus asserts, to be free from pain, then, O Chrysippus, the first admission was correctly made to you, that the hand, when it was in that condition, was in want of nothing; but the second admission was not equally correct, that if pleasure were a good it would wish for it. For it would not*

wish for it for this reason, inasmuch as whatever is free from pain is in pleasure.

9. **On Ends Book One, 56** : *By this time so much at least is plain, that the intensest pleasure or the intensest annoyance felt in the mind exerts more influence on the happiness or wretchedness of life than either feeling, when present for an equal space of time in the body. We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain. [57] But as we are elated by the blessings to which we look forward, so we delight in those which we call to memory. Fools however are tormented by the recollection of misfortunes; wise men rejoice in keeping fresh the thankful recollection of their past blessings. Now it is in the power of our wills to bury our adversity in almost unbroken forgetfulness, and to agreeably and sweetly remind ourselves of our prosperity. But when we look with penetration and concentration of thought upon things that are past, then, if those things are bad, grief usually ensues, if good, joy.*
10. **On Ends Book One, 62** : *But these doctrines may be stated in a certain manner so as not merely to disarm our criticism, but actually to secure our sanction. For this is the way in which Epicurus represents the wise man as continually happy; he keeps his passions within bounds; about death he is indifferent; he holds true views concerning the eternal gods apart from all dread; he has no hesitation in crossing the boundary of life, if that be the better course. Furnished with these advantages he is continually in a state of pleasure, and there is in truth no moment at which he does not experience more pleasures than pains. For he remembers the past with thankfulness, and the present is so much his own that he is aware of its importance and its agreeableness, nor is he in dependence on the future, but awaits it while enjoying the present; he is also very far removed from those defects of character which I quoted a little time ago, and when he compares the fool's life with his own, he feels great pleasure. And pains, if any befall him, have never power enough to prevent the wise man from finding more reasons for joy than for vexation.*
11. **On Ends Book Two, 9** : Cicero: "...[B]ut unless you are extraordinarily obstinate you are bound to admit that 'freedom from pain' does not mean the same thing as 'pleasure.'" Torquatus: "Well but on this point you will find me obstinate, for it is as true as any proposition can be."
12. **On Ends, Book Two, 11**: Cicero: Still, I replied, granting that there is nothing better (that point I waive for the moment), surely it does not therefore follow that what I may call the negation of pain is the same thing as pleasure?" Torquatus: "Clearly the same, he says, and indeed the greatest, beyond which none greater can possibly be." (Plane idem, inquit, et maxima quidem, qua fieri nulla maior potest. Cic. Fin. 2.11)
13. **On Ends Book Two, 16** : *"This, O Torquatus, is doing violence to one's senses; it is wresting out of our minds the understanding of words with which we are imbued; for who*

can avoid seeing that these three states exist in the nature of things: first, the state of being in pleasure; secondly, that of being in pain; thirdly, that of being in such a condition as we are at this moment, and you too, I imagine, that is to say, neither in pleasure nor in pain; in such pleasure, I mean, as a man who is at a banquet, or in such pain as a man who is being tortured. What! do you not see a vast multitude of men who are neither rejoicing nor suffering, but in an intermediate state between these two conditions? No, indeed, said he; I say that all men who are free from pain are in pleasure, and in the greatest pleasure too. Do you, then, say that the man who, not being thirsty himself, mingles some wine for another, and the thirsty man who drinks it when mixed, are both enjoying the same pleasure?"

14. **Epicurus to Idomeneus, Diogenes Laertius:** *On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could increase them; but I set above them all the gladness of mind at the memory of our past conversations. But I would have you, as becomes your lifelong attitude to me and to philosophy, watch over the children of Metrodorus.*

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/59337915>

Post by "Don" of April 3, 2024 at 7:51 PM

LOL! So.... This is going to be a *four-hour* episode? 😊 Looking forward to participating!

Post by "Cassius" of April 3, 2024 at 7:53 PM

I would think you can quickly summarize the precise answers to all those questions in no more than twenty minutes at most! 😊

Post by "Cassius" of April 7, 2024 at 3:13 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3790-episode-222-revisiting-the-relationship-between-happiness-and-pleasure/>

Thanks to Don for standing in for Joshua in our recording of podcast 222. I think it went well and I will work to get it posted as soon as possible.

Post by “Don” of April 7, 2024 at 4:57 PM

Here are some of my notes from my preparation for the episode. The first cache:

Why do I keep harping on the inadequacy on the word "happy"?

To me, "happy" implies "tra-la-la, skipping through the daisies, fizzy, effervescent feelings." There's nothing wrong with feeling happy!! "Happy" to me is a fleeting of-the-moment feeling. "Happy" gets used for sooooo many words in Greek and Latin that, to me, it obscures what is actually going on. Translators just seem to go "We'll throw that in the 'happy' basket. Done!" Even the "Call no man "happy"" episode with Croesus recounted by Herodotus used ὀλβιώτατος (olbiotatos) and ὀλβιος (olbios) - not eudaimonia, not khara, not makarios - a whole new word! But in the famous quote usually translated as "Call no man happy until he's dead, it doesn't refer to the kind of feeling I get when I hear "happy" ([Herodotus 1.32.7](#))

Quote

Quote

[7] If besides all this he ends his life well, then he is the one whom you seek, the one worthy to be called **fortunate**. But refrain from calling him **fortunate** before he dies; call him *lucky*.

‘ [7] εἰ δὲ πρὸς τούτοις ἔτι τελευτήσῃ τὸν βίον εὖ, οὗτος ἐκεῖνος τὸν σὺ ζητέεις, ὁ **ὀλβιος** κεκληῖσθαι ἄξιός ἐστί: πρὶν δ’ ἂν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν, μηδὲ καλέειν κω **ὀλβιον** ἀλλ’ εὐτυχέα. ’

olbios and olbiotatos (the superlative form) " is defined in Liddell & Scott as "happy, blessed, blest; (of things) rich, prosperous" which reminds me more of makarios (the description of the happiness of the gods and the "blessed life") than English "happy." The words come from olbos "wealth, prosperity, riches; happiness, bliss, fortune."

Which to me also echoes eudaimonia. The [Stanford philosophy site](#) gave an explanation of eudaimonia as "The term is perhaps best understood in connection with the success or good fortune a person would enjoy when under the protection of a guardian angel." To me, the concept is better understood as "fortunate, having an inner sense of well-being, resilient, "rich"

in the metaphorical sense, confident in one's self-reliance, content (BUT not milquetoast doormat-y contentment), able to appreciate "the little things" and so on. To me, "happy" doesn't fit that semantic hole neatly. Maybe "happiness" or a "sense of happiness." If we can agree that *that* is what "happy" means, I can use the word... but I won't be "happy" about it



So, Epicurus was not "happy happy skipping through daisies" on his last day. He was content with the way his life had gone. He was satisfied that he had lived a "good" life. He took enjoyment in recollecting the path he had taken, in the friends he had made, and in the pleasures he had experienced. In his letter to Idomeneus, Epicurus calls his last day "blessed" (makarion). And "But the cheerfulness (χαῖρον khairon) of my mind, which arises from the recollection of all our philosophical contemplations, counterbalances all these afflictions." (Yonge's translation with amending "our" instead of "my philosophical...") khairon is a form of the word used for the kinetic pleasure of "joy" khara. And Epicurus doesn't say the "joy" outweighs or conquers the pain of his condition. The word used is Ἀντιπαρατάσσομαι (antiparatassomai) which conveys "holding one's ground against, and in drawing up troops in battle order, side by side, ready to do battle against an enemy." He can do battle with the physical pain with the kinetic "joy" he can experience. I don't want to do down a kinetic/katastematic rabbit hole but there you go.

That's part of the reason I dislike saying things like "Epicurus was 'happy' on his last day" or "Call no man 'happy' until he dies." It glosses over too much and paints a skewed picture of what is actually being conveyed by the texts.

Post by “Cassius” of April 7, 2024 at 10:15 PM

Lucretius Today Podcast Episode 222 - "Revisiting The Relationship Between Happiness And Pleasure" Is Now Available -

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/59337915>

Post by “Don” of April 8, 2024 at 8:39 AM

More notes:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3790-episode-222-revisiting-the-relationship-between-happiness-and-pleasure/>

Did Epicurus hold that Pain is properly thought of as the ultimate or Chief Evil, and how do we make sense of that statement?

I'm my opinion, Cicero is trying to use Epicurus's (correct!) contention that pleasure is the summum bonum to say evil is the summum malum.

What is the relation to pleasure and pain?

Here's the way Cicero put it:

XXXII. But to return to our theme (for we were speaking about pain when we drifted into the consideration of this letter) we may now thus sum up the whole matter: he who is subject to the greatest possible evil (summo malo) is not happy (beatus) so long as he remains subject to it, whereas the wise man always is happy (beatus), though he is at times subject to pain (dolore); pain therefore is not the greatest possible evil (summum malum dolor).

Using Google Translate: "He who is in the highest evil, while he is in it, is not happy. but the wise man is always happy and is sometimes in pain; therefore pain is not the greatest evil." THIS is a much preferable way of looking at it.

Some may bring up Vatican Saying 42 which Saint-Andre translates as:

[42] At the very same time, the greatest good is created and the greatest evil is removed.

BUT on VS42, see [Versions of Vatican Saying 42](#)

THAT'S NOT WHAT'S in the manuscript!! There is NO τοῦ κακοῦ ("evil") in the manuscript! That's an addition...

BUT the other "correction" by Bailey and others reads:

Ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ γενέσεως τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀπολαύσεως.

"The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment" [Bailey]

SO... there is no consensus on the *correct* reading of VS 42. I wouldn't use that for support one way or the other because of the difficulties in the manuscript.

I think Cicero is trying to use the opposite of "summum bonum" which is just the Latin for telos or greatest good... THAT TO WHICH EVERYTHING ELSE POINTS - OUR ULTIMATE REASON FOR DOING ANYTHING... which, according to Epicurus (correctly in my opinion) is PLEASURE.

Cicero takes "summum malum" uses that to refer to PAIN. MAYBE pain COULD be called the "summum malum" but I don't think that characterization works. Avoiding pain is that to which everything "points away from"?... BUT an Epicurean is STILL going to voluntarily take on some pain if a greater pleasure can ensue later.

In Epicurus's philosophy, there is ultimately ONLY PAIN and PLEASURE.

Post by “Bryan” of April 8, 2024 at 12:02 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus doesn't say the "joy" outweighs or conquers the pain of his condition. The word used is ἄντιπαρατάσσομαι (antiparatassomai) which conveys "holding one's ground against, and in drawing up troops in battle order, side by side, ready to do battle against an enemy."

[Quote from Don](#)

There is NO τοῦ κακοῦ (“evil”) in the manuscript! That’s an addition...

Great points, Don, thank you! I have noticed that Perseus has been slow again lately, I wanted to recommend [this site](#), which I just started using.

Post by “Don” of April 8, 2024 at 12:09 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I have noticed that Perseus has been slow again lately, I wanted to recommend this site, which I just started using.

Great! Thanks... and to that resource:
<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/%E1%BC%80%CE%B...%BC%CE%B1%CE%B9>

Post by “Bryan” of April 8, 2024 at 12:23 PM

As you said, the idea of "joy" in that sentence is coming from kairon.

"...ἀντιπαρατάττετο δὲ πᾶσι τούτοις τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν χαῖρον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν γεγονότων ἡμῖν διαλογισμῶν μνήμη."

...but over against them all I set gladness of mind at the remembrance of our past contemplations.

We can always organize our lives and our minds to better prevent pain and also "hold our ground against" existing pain. Good points, thanks again!

Post by "Bryan" of April 8, 2024 at 4:48 PM

Cassius, I think what you said here in the intro and at (20:00 -- 20:20) is exactly what Epicurus wanted us to be clear about -- it is more important that we (1) get a clear view about what we are talking about, rather than (2) use the most precise words. Of course, both are good goals to have!

Great podcast everybody!