

Flourishing / Pleasure as the goal

Post by “Matteng” of June 30, 2026 at 5:27 PM

Hi together,

I had a discussion with a Stoic and he challenged me in stating that "flourishing" would be a "better" goal of life than Pleasure (I know with flourishing he mean "Virtue"). His points:

1. Evolution: Pleasure/Pain are signals but instrumental for living and the self-preservation of bodily/mental functions. Seeing the inner decision-making self as the pure self than self-preservation as goal fits with Evolution, it would be the Evolution of the Virtuous Self.
2. Following Pleasure directly, leads not always to happiness but sometimes to misery (sugar, drugs, anti-social behaviour). Following to aim at the good life has not that problem (Virtue).
3. Following human flourishing means social activities, following Pleasure could lead to unsocial immorality actions, when that (unjust activities) give Pleasure, an Epicurean could not have Objections.
4. Pleasure is only an temporary End but in life there is no end but is everlasting activity. Evolution gives no everlasting happiness based on pleasure. Eudaimonia was defined by Aristotles as an activity not an end state. Does a happy person or god do nothing when reached everlasting Absence of Pain ?

What would be your points / objections against this ? Why is or is not "Life / Living" the greatest good in Epicureanism ?

Or maybe it is ? Pleasant living ? Maybe Flourishing / Pleasure is a fals dichotomy ? Like a Flow state ?

How fits Pleasure as goal to our current knowledge about evolutionary processes / psychology and social acts ?

Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2026 at 5:48 PM

First, you have to understand that Pleasure to Epicurus was extremely broad, encompassing all that is desirable in life (because it is not painful).

But you're really talking about a time frame issue.

Pleasure is the guide and one of only two feelings, but Epicurus says at the opening of the letter to Menoecus that the goal of life is *happiness*. When you drill down into the sources you find that a life of happiness means a life in which pleasure is predominating over pain. It is not necessary to eliminate all pain in order to be happy, as Epicurus himself was happy even in pain in his last days.

As Diogenes of Oinoanda said:

Quote

Fr. 32

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.

Torquatus also says something very similar, that a life of happiness is a life of pleasure.

"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."

There is also a David Sedley issue on this:

"Epicurean vs Cyreniac Happiness" which discusses this time frame issue. Pleasure is the ultimate way to describe anything that is desirable. Happiness is a pleasure, but "happiness" as in "a happy life" refers to an assessment as in discussing a "happy life" which is an abstract concept, and this distinguishes the Epicureans from the Cyreniacs as Sedley explains.

Post by "Cassius" of June 30, 2026 at 8:02 PM

I see I really only addressed part of those questions, and at the very least 2 and 3 are separate. I will come back when I have more time but i welcome others to chime in as these are common questions.