PD09 - Condensed Pleasure

Post by “Elayne” of March 25, 2019 at 2:57 PM

Condensed Pleasure

This is my work in progress on condensed pleasure, with several parts remaining to be filled in. I thought maybe before I go too much farther, it would be good to get some outside evaluation, in case I’m headed down a dead end somewhere. It’s long so I thought this was a better place for it for now than FB.

I am aware writing this that it may be longer than it needs to be. I am having to divide in sections because of the word count limit. My ultimate goal is to make this as simple as possible, for the clearest communication—but not simpler than necessary (paraphrase of quote which may or may not have been from Einstein https://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/05/13/einstein-simple/). I My apologies for this messy intermediate state of things!

PD 9 states “If every pleasure were alike condensed in duration and associated with the whole organism or the dominant parts of it, pleasures would never differ from one another.” Is there another quote in which Epicurus uses that word "condensed"?

DeWitt says “condensed” refers to “intensity” (Epicurus and His Philosophy, p 233). DeWitt also says “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.”

DeWitt gives this as an example of condensed pleasure “[t]hat which occasions unsurpassable joy is the bare escape from some dreadful calamity” and this as the corresponding extended pleasure, “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 this problem out.” DeWitt says “[n]evertheless, 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.” (Epicurus and His Philosophy, p 233). DeWitt also says that static pleasure “describes the return to normal after the joy of escape from the peril of life” (p. 243). Does Epicurus say this himself?

One thing that confuses me when DeWitt contrasts those pleasures is that using the word “exquisite” for the static pleasure seems like a fairly intense pleasure. Not knowing the Greek, I do not know whether Epicurus used words for that second example of pleasure which would imply less intensity, but at least in the English translation DeWitt uses, both sound intense.

This is all that I have seen so far about condensed pleasure, and I hope some of you will have some additional quotes to add.

There appear to be two conclusions DeWitt is making. First, about intensity and second about static vs kinetic. Do you agree these are two separate conclusions? Must one follow from the other?

All I see clearly said in PD 9 is condensed referring to duration. DeWitt is adding on the idea of intensity as if that follows inescapably from condensation of duration—I take this as something like: take the pleasure you might have over 24 hrs and experience all of it in an hour, and it will be more intense. Does anyone know if there is further evidence to substantiate this conclusion, that this was Epicurus' meaning?

The application of condensed and extended to mean not just intense and less intense but also kinetic and static is a second assumption that does not necessarily follow from the first. Is there any text evidence that this must be the case?

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Post by "Elayne" of March 25, 2019 at 2:58 PM

Lacking further knowledge about additional words of Epicurus, I will now move on to my personal experience and medical research. DeWitt's first conclusion, about intensity being related to timing, seems to hold up reasonably well on personal testing. If I do a number of pleasurable things in a short period, one after another, the sensation of pleasure I have is often more intense.

At first, however, I was not sure that simply more pleasures in a shorter time was the _only_ way to achieve intensity of pleasure. Examples of highly intense pleasure for me personally would include extremely palatable foods, orgasm, and thrilling physical sensations such as coasting down a steep hill on a bicycle. The speed, I supposed, could be considered a shortening of the pleasure duration of coasting down the hill, but I am not sure that is right, because just going very slowly down a hill does not provide me with any particular pleasure. DeWitt would have to say I am having pleasure but not noticing it, and then we are in the realm of fantasy. It's also hard to see how to apply that to a bite of chocolate or orgasm—I don't know how to make those less intense by slowing them down. On the contrary, both seem even more intense that way—eating slowly/ savoring, etc.

But... then I thought—what would be the underlying mechanism for condensing a pleasure into a shorter time period? Wouldn't there have to be a brain activity going on? Pleasure isn't a disembodied event—there is matter/energy and void only. Now I will need to look at neurotransmitter production, binding to receptors, and re-uptake to see if there is research on that related to qualitative intensity of pleasure. This is an area of neurology I have minimal

knowledge about. I do know that it is possible to block the experience of pleasure with activities like sunbathing, by administering naloxone to block our opiate receptors. (If I recall correctly, the researchers used this to conclude that sunbathing was an addiction and therefore bad--omg, really, people? An example of our societal fear of pleasure!) I do not know what has been done to find out how our brain achieves intensity of feeling. I think this will be important to understand what is happening with condensation of pleasure. If we can correlate feelings of pleasure intensity with something like number of hits of endorphins on our endogenous receptors per time period, that would fit perfectly with the idea that intensity is related to timing—not of the bike ride but of the brain events. An extended pleasure might be the same number of endorphin- receptor contacts but over a longer period of time. But this is entirely conjecture on my part, so far.

I also know there are proposed to be a number of different pleasure neurotransmitters—dopamine, serotonin, endorphins (there are several), oxytocin and endocannabinoids (our own internal cannabis). To back up the idea that pleasure is one category of thing, there needs to be some commonality of event going on in the brain, despite these different neurotransmitters, which is underlying pleasure. This could either be at the neurotransmitter level, such that one of the neurotransmitters is the “real” pleasure molecule, or something afterwards—some common effect of those neurotransmitters which is felt as pleasure. Otherwise I do not see how we can say that all pleasures are ultimately the same if equally intense (condensed)/ equally distributed in the body. Is there an alternative to thinking this way?

My guess is that endorphins are one key, because when these are blocked with naloxone, there is not pleasure, from what I’ve seen. I know that for me, when my daughter was an infant and I was on my newborn nursery rotation in medical school, hearing other babies cry would sometimes trigger an oxytocin mediated milk letdown—but this was not pleasurable, more so annoying, lol. So I don’t think oxytocin alone is sufficient for pleasure. I will see what I can find out in the neuropsych research. It’s quite possible we don’t know enough to say, yet. But if endorphins are what trigger the feeling of pleasure, it’s possible that actual biological event happening that corresponds with the feeling of pleasure is not the endorphins but the next step, when the endorphins bind the receptors and cause a cascade of events with ion channels. If there are convergent process of different neurotransmitters resulting in some common event, this would make sense—for such a critical process as pleasure, it seems unlikely that we would have no kind of backup systems.

I know there is a difference between the subjective feeling, the qualia, and the observable events of matter. However, in other cases, there is correlation—there are wavelengths of light perceived by us as red, subjectively. That is why I would expect a similar correlation in the brain when it comes to feelings of pleasure.

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Post by “Elayne” of March 25, 2019 at 2:59 PM

Now, how does intensity relate to fullness of pleasure? My experience is that intensity is not required for fullness of pleasure—only the absence of pain. Depending on how the neuro research goes, this could be me saying “even one endorphin-receptor interaction, in the absence of pain, registers as pleasure”, but I think it is more likely that we need a certain threshold level of pleasurable neurotransmitter activity going on or we will have pain. This suspicion is based on research I have seen and need to dig up about people who are deficient in endocannabinoid production, who tend to have pain but without obvious cause. Our bodies are undergoing internal movement and contact with the environment, and I suspect that our basic state would be pain if we had no pleasure processes at all going on. So the better wording would be “if there is exactly enough endorphin activity going on to counteract all the pain of the body, the result is pleasure. If there is only slightly less, the result is pain. There is no in between.” If I am correct, this would be biological evidence to support what Epicurus said about the impossibility of a neutral state. My experience already agrees with him.

There is an experiential difference between a less intense but still fully pleasurable sensation and an intense one, but it does not feel like a difference in completeness/ fullness of the pleasure cup. This is something I rely on others to know from experience, since I can’t prove it. I do not consider highly intense pleasure to be more or less preferable to less intense. The reason I know this is that if I am in a state of even mildly intense pleasure, sitting with friends after a satisfying meal, I have zero desire to jump up and bike down a nearby hill to increase my pleasure. (This is similar to what the “rat park” and related human studies have found about addiction—that neither rats nor humans are interested in drug-mediated pleasure if they are in an otherwise pleasant environment. It’s not really the substance itself that creates the addictions but the underlying lack of ordinary pleasures). Nor do I want to stop mid-hill on my bike so I can go have a less intense pleasure. Anyway, I would not call intensity an increase of pleasure, but it is nevertheless at least a characteristic of pleasure that it can be more or less intense.

The next thing I would say from personal experience is that highly intense pleasure-producing stimuli can become painful if prolonged, but I suggest this is NOT related to the pleasure itself—rather, I perceive that it is related to the intensity of the stimulation and/or the intense biological response to an intense stimulus. It is hard to sort these things out as they are experienced simultaneously, but that is my proposal. Being tickled very briefly can feel pleasurable, but if it goes on and on, it is too much and is no fun—in that case, the pleasure itself vanishes and the intense stimulus persists. If the pleasure I am feeling is internal ecstasy—when I was younger, although I didn’t experiment with drugs, I experimented with some bliss-promoting meditation practices—the biological demands on my body, including my brain, required to sustain that level of intensity can be exhausting and become uncomfortable. Even the sensation which one second ago felt blissful begins to feel like pain. However, I do not

say it is the pleasure itself that causes this, but the intensity of biological response, because once a sensation becomes painful, it is not pleasurable by definition. I wonder what this would look like, at the molecular level in the brain—what changes, at that instant when a stimulus becomes painful? This type of intense pleasure can be followed by a “let-down” instead of an afterglow which I suspect is similar to coming down off an intoxicant. I found the aftermath of these meditation practices so unpleasant that I quit doing them years ago. I have wondered if internally stimulated intense pleasure can possibly have a similar effect to exogenous opiates—do the receptors down-regulate?

Another example of intensity would be pharmaceutical opiates, which bind to our endogenous receptors in a tighter manner than our own endorphins, stimulating us more intensely than we are biologically evolved to cope with, at least on an ongoing basis. In response, our bodies down-regulate the receptors, to escape the excessive stimulation. And then when the opiates are removed, that person for a time will have difficulty experiencing endogenous pleasure, because the receptors must recover first. Our bodies regulate intensity of response to a stimulus, to restore the homeostasis necessary for survival. ** I need to double check the research and add references for this section, since it is just what I remember reading.

In the psychiatric literature, an argument is made that we can have “too much pleasure” based on disorders such as mania in bipolar disease, where the extreme joy is not related to external stimuli but has become unhinged. I would say here they are really commenting on intensity, plus disconnection from reality. I think they are making an error to believe that what happens in a disease state refers to pleasure in the absence of such an illness—as if they are saying “don’t get too happy, or you might come down with bipolar mania and give away your car to a stranger in a fit of happiness.” We have no evidence to my knowledge that intense enjoyment causes bipolar disease. There are several possibilities for the cause of bipolar, one of the more interesting ones having to do with the multiple body “clocks”, various circadian rhythms, getting out of time with each other. But if intense neurotransmitter hits are unsafe for the body in some other way, the usual warning mechanism is pain. So I don’t think it is unreasonable to imagine that there is possibly a danger in highly intense/ condensed ordinarily pleasure-producing stimuli for prolonged periods, although the specifics of intensity thresholds and durations would likely vary from one individual to another, because there are a lot of genetic differences, such as at the receptor level.

I think this is important to clarify, because it is part of the fear of pleasure people have. If we can make it clear that the pleasure is not dangerous but that intense stimulation can sometimes have painful effects, we can encourage people to drop their worries that if they engage in pleasure all the time, they will be sorry later. There is still a natural limit to desire for intense stimuli, in that pain will begin when a stimulus is too intense for too long, for a given person.

There are some people who are biologically less responsive to a range of stimuli. It takes more to achieve the same internal response. These are people who like very hot pepper, sky diving, horror movies, etc. Some of them have to go very nearly to the point of escaping death on a regular basis before they are able to notice pleasure, and indeed many of them do die, such as with base jumping. Some of this can be combated by teaching them to slow down and pay attention to less intense pleasures, because it can partly be a habit—personal experience with patients. But there are actual genetic differences that seem to correlate with this as well. A lower responsiveness to stimuli can correlate with lower conscience and higher sociopathy. (** again, I need to supply references to medical literature for all these points).

The way in which I see Epicurus addressing this is simply with avoiding pleasures that bring along more pains. And that seems quite sufficient for me, but I also think that it would help reduce fears by specifically addressing stimulus/response intensity as an issue, with science-based correlates.

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Post by “Elayne” of March 25, 2019 at 3:00 PM

On to the second conclusion of DeWitt, that intensity goes with kinetic pleasure and less intensity with static pleasure, my personal experience does not fully agree. There are plenty of kinetic, active pleasures which are wonderful but not intense, such as taking a walk on a Spring day. There are static pleasures, such as the afterglow from sex, which is not more intense than orgasm but is more intense than the pleasure of a nice walk—and the afterglow is not active. I am not actively thinking or doing anything during that time to produce it. It is literally an abundance of neurotransmitters produced by the orgasm which are still flooding my body. There is an afterglow of actions like having given a gift to one of my children that they really liked—I am not doing anything particular to ramp that up, but it is a warm happy feeling that persists for quite some time. There is the static pleasure which persists after having thought about the fact that I am fed, warm, safe, dry and have friends, which lasts beyond the time when I am actively thinking about it. This is all due to neurotransmitter effects, nothing mysterious. But I do not find that activity and intensity are tightly bound in my experience, when comparing one pleasure to another.

However, I can make a definite case for the static component of a particular kinetic pleasure being less intense, which would match the typical pattern of neurotransmitter action. Is this possibly what DeWitt is referring to?

I cannot think of any static pleasure which was not initiated by a kinetic one, kinetic including a thought or a perceptible bodily action. Can you?

A few loose ends

I have some cautions to suggest in evaluating intensity and kinetic pleasure vs static. I notice that some people make the mistake of guessing the intensity of a pleasure from the stimulus or from the person's outward expression. We know from temperament research (need citations) that one person may feel a given stimulus much more intensely than another. We also know that outward expression of felt intensity may vary widely from one person to another. Someone can feel intensely angry, for instance, and have a guarded poker face. Another person may not feel intensely angry but can be in the habit of using vigorous body language associated with anger. I would avoid guessing the subjective intensity whenever it is possible to ask the person involved. If time-based condensation of pleasure holds up at the neurotransmitter level—more hits in a shorter time = more intensity—then it is only at that level where we might be able to predict intensity from the objective position.

The same is true for kinetic vs static. A person can be moving around but be mainly feeling static pleasure from a prior kinetic pleasure. A person can be lying in a hammock and actively producing pleasure by thinking of happy memories.

From the Letter to Menoeceus, we have "When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure." So, how does the person who has learned to prolong static pleasure become motivated to get off the sofa? One who has already studied enough science to be entirely free of fears of the unreal? If they are not feeling pain, where is the desire going to come from, to change positions? This is when planning is also very important, because staying on the sofa all day in a state of bliss is not likely to lead to long term pleasure. For long term pleasure of the body, some exercise is needed (insert quote from Jefferson talking to his friend). For long term friendship one must get off the sofa and be with friends. Similarly, one must usually act to have income for food, shelter, and other needs. There is nothing wrong with prolonged static pleasure in itself, unless failing to intersperse kinetic pleasure will result in more pain later. The most pleasure producing mix of static and kinetic has to be determined on a case by case basis.

Post by "Cassius" of March 25, 2019 at 3:29 PM

Wow this is going to take time to read -- thanks!

Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 3:53 PM

Elayne on section one as to DeWitt's interpretation, I think DeWitt is making a good effort to make sense of it, but I am not entirely convinced his point is the complete one. Whenever i hear the static/kinetic distinction being raised, or see it said that this was important to Epicurus, I question the analysis. I am sorry that the best I can do is to point in the direction of researching this, but there are several sources on this that would be a good idea to check.

Perhaps the most clear is Boris Nikolosky's Epicurus on Pleasure (in files section here.) Nikolsky argues that kinetic/static was of no significance to Epicurus at all, and that the only reason it is discussed is that later writers (Cicero, Laertius) had by their day become accustomed to that distinction from other writers, and they attempted to fit Epicurus into that same pattern. If I recall correctly Nikolsky cites a "Division by Carneades" as the source of this categorization.

For his own insight, Nikolsky credits Gosling & Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure" which is a treatise that starts from the earliest Greek philosophers and traces their views on pleasure. By the time they come to Epicurus, gosling and taylor conclude that the "absence of pain" problem that we have today is erroneous, and they put forth an argument similar to what you see me repeating, that "pleasure" always means something that is normally understood by everyone, and that "ataraxia" or "absence of pain" is not a particular esoteric type of pleasure.

There is another article, by Wentham, that makes the same point.

All of these would probably need to be considered in evaluating DeWitt's conclusion. I would say at this point in my study that time and intensity have something to do with condensation, but probably NOT the kinetic/static issue.

Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 3:58 PM

"My experience is that intensity is not required for fullness of pleasure—only the absence of pain"

I think that is an important point. it is probably true, from a "fullness" perspective, that someone could sit in a cave and eat water and bread and if they worked hard enough mentally and physically t o do it, they could focus entirely on pleasures and reduce pains to an absolute

minimum and say that they are full - FOR THAT PERIOD OF TIME.

That's why I think the fullness issue has to be considered in the widest time period -- the full lifespan of the individual. The reason the cave-dweller's method is not going to work is that it is not sustainable in real life. In real life all sorts of things outside the cave are of relevance and necessary for continuation.

So even if a "mind-discipline ascetic focus on the pleasure of looking at the candle approach" worked for a short period of time, Nature / Reality makes such an approach unsustainable and therefore not to be chosen.

Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 4:04 PM

> Quote from Elayne
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> I cannot think of any static pleasure which was not initiated by a kinetic one, kinetic including a thought or a perceptible bodily action. Can you?

On this issue I sense that there are some very specific philosophical arguments involved about which I am not aware. I came away from my reading of Gosling & Taylor, Elayne thinking that he was documenting that if we dive deep enough into the sources, we will find that the ancients meant what they said when they said "static" -- they meant something that involves NO MOTION, NO CHANGE IN STATE whatsoever.

Where I am going here is that one of the flaws of the entire "static" category is that of course NOTHING in an Epicurean universe is truly unmoving or unchanging. Movement and change are constant. I think that this is one of the most compelling reasons why "static pleasure" as a category in the Epicurean framework needs to be looked on with extreme suspicion .

Unfortunately I am very aware that this point needs documentation to some ancient text, and I cannot provide it at the moment, but I am pretty sure it is in Gosling and Taylor when they first bring up the arguments about the natures of pleasure.

In fact, Elayne, as I think about what you are writing, the Gosling & Taylor book would be of tremendous use to you.

Post by “Hiram” of March 26, 2019 at 10:23 AM

"associated with the whole organism or the dominant parts of it" tells me that pleasure happens IN THE BODY (even mental pleasures), that (different parts of) the body have the wisdom to produce (different types of) pleasure, and that any study of the variation of pleasure must be bodily rooted.

Also: We can't experience intense pleasure 24-7 because we have to sleep, plus ***the experience of intense pleasure requires intense energy consumption***. Take the orgasm, and consider the after-effect, the post-coital fatigue that comes from reaching the intensity of orgasm. This fatigue is indicative that a HUGE AMOUNT of energy was just consumed by the brain and the body in producing that experience. And so we conclude from observation that intense pleasures require energy, which is not unlimited.

Because the body only has a limited supply of energy available, we conclude that nature has placed certain limits to the amount of pleasure the organism can experience.

Also, concerning the neuroscience of pleasure, you may want to read "Buddha's Brain". I wrote a book review here:

http://societyofepicurus.com/reasonings-about-neuroscience/

AND concerning the impossibility of inaction, consider this:

> Quote
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> Most men are insensible when they rest, and mad when they act. – Vatican Saying 11

which (I think) means that most people need to learn or train themselves to experience pleasure both while active and passive, and that therefore Epicurean philosophy presumably is part of that curriculum.

When we study the brain in this manner, we frequently speak as if the organism was a passive recipient or processes and there was no agency (this is probably part of what leads many like Sam Harris to conclude there is no free will--simply because they don't know how to fully account for how this agency emerges, but the fact is that it is there). It's as if you couldn't choose to take five minutes to stop, draw a deep breath, engage in a gratitude practice, and reset your attitude from time to time. **Attitude regulation** is a HUGE part of Epicurean practice, if we are to believe Diogenes of Oenoanda and Philodemus of Gadara, and I am convinced that without gratitude it is impossible to profit from EP.

So the factor of how does the sentient being actively engage in the production of his or her narrative must also be considered, and not merely the processes in the brain and the body that produce pleasure.

Post by “Elayne” of March 27, 2019 at 11:04 AM

There are some neurologic correlates at least to persistence of pleasure, once initiated-- there is reason to believe these are two separate things, pleasure and having it last. This is from research on anhedonia, where researchers found the difference in anhedonia vs normal pleasure was NOT that there was no pleasure in anhedonia but that it did not persist as long. I have to look that up too. It has to do with signaling from the PFC. It's a neurologic after-glow sort of thing.

This could be a different concept though, from static and kinetic-- more to do with the initiation and extension of pleasure. DeWitt said that static pleasure was what helped Epicurus argue for the possibility of continual pleasure-- but extended duration of pleasure after an initiating action (including a thought) might work just as well or better. If we had to take constant action, every minute, to enjoy ourselves, that might be hard to sustain. Let down your guard for an instant and poof! That's not how it feels though-- it feels like there is a lingering effect which agrees with the anhedonia research. Then all you have to do for sustained pleasure is boost it as needed and also plan for the future.

Post by “Elayne” of March 27, 2019 at 11:26 AM

Thanks, Hiram, the fatigue/ finite physical energy is huge-- not sure why I didn't think of that, but definitely needs to be part of the limit on intensity-- and fits with the idea of condensed being an event per time based thing, at the molecular level. It's not a limit on the fullness of pleasure but on the intensity.

The issue of Harris and free will-- I think this is a very hard concept to explain, but we do need to keep in mind that there is not sentient being with agency which is other than "merely the processes in the brain and the body that produce pleasure." The decisional capacity itself is one of those brain processes. An important process but not separate. I don't fault Harris for having trouble with this-- not sure if I can do any better-- because our language really gets in the way. What he is arguing against is something people think they believe in but which is entirely impossible. The type of free will most people believe in would require a ghost in a machine-- a separate soul which is somehow a free agent in regards to the brain and the body.

I have had some success explaining it in this way: when I was born, I made no decisions about my DNA, mitochondria, parents, social environment, etc. My beginnings had no agency of mine involved whatsoever. (Of course, you know many people think otherwise). As long as I am

talking to atheists, I think there is not going to be argument against this point.

If we say that I did not create myself with agency, at some time there must have been a first actual decision I made-- a movement of an arm or a leg, for instance. That decision, that agency, could only have been produced by a brain I had no decisional input into creating. So that first decision, although made by me and not by my mother, was 100% dependent upon decisions not made by me. It was not "free" in that sense. From the moment of conception, the components/ function of my brain are affected by everything in the environment-- foods, the weather, other people, viruses, etc. My brain is also affected by each decision I make. It is still me making that decision, not my mother, the weather, etc. So I clearly have agency. But at no point does there exist a homunculus inside of me which can be traced back to anything other than the total interactions of my starting material and my environment. The self which makes each decision is not constructed by anything which has become independent/ free-floating in regards to the starting material and the subsequent environment. The environment includes "the swerve", but we also do not create "the swerve"-- if we did, it would not be a swerve at all but also a product of us plus the environment.

Those who believe in the supernatural are imagining a separate spiritual being which can override the biological being, and that's how they imagine free will. Some of them imagine sort of free spirit that emerges from inert matter-- but what would have gone into producing the characteristics of that emergent free spirit, if not the starting material plus the environment? I don't see how that would work.

Some people feel like this means we aren't making decisions, and that doesn't make sense. We are certainly deciding. Harris knows that but spends more time on how the "we" which decides gets formed. I may have done no better, above, but that is my go at it.

Post by “Hiram” of March 27, 2019 at 11:56 AM

I think I read somewhere that the brain is the organ that consumes BY FAR the most energy, accounting for up to 20 % of total energy consumption in the body.

Also, on agency and freedom, Sartre tackles this when he says that we are what we make of what life gives us, and in his existential literature he delves into the tension between our facticity (that which we are born with, that we have no control over and acts as gravity pulling us down) and our instinct of freedom, our process of self-creation which we do have control over.

A Concrete Self - addresses some of these "ghost in the machine" issues, which really are inherited from a faulty, Platonized interpretation of reality. The essay reconciles a modern materialist theory of self with Epicurus' teachings in his Epistle to Herodotus according to which bodies gain complexity as they grow and gain particles, and with added complexity they generate "relational" or secondary properties beyond the conventional "atoms and void" properties--both of which are observable and real. The real, observable self emerges organically as symbiosis, as complex systems (like all else in nature), not as a Platonic "Casper" without a body.

http://societyofepicurus.com/a-concrete-self/

Post by “Cassius” of March 27, 2019 at 2:08 PM

Getting back to a point of the original post on which I have not commented, I think this is important:

> Quote from Elayne
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> PD 9 states “If every pleasure were alike condensed in duration and associated with the whole organism or the dominant parts of it, pleasures would never differ from one another.” Is there another quote in which Epicurus uses that word "condensed"?

I haven't had time to check back in the sources, but I don't think there is much else - this seems to be the main and perhaps only use of the term. Let's tag Elli and she if she is aware of any other occurrences.

If indeed this is the only or main one, that would be another reason to be cautious about reading too much into it. I tend to think that in *most* cases Epicurean philosophy is pretty simple and direct and that words that might seem like they are obscure or technical (such as "ataraxia") really are NOT so obscure or technical. And what goes with that is that people who try to take a word and make it into something difficult are in dangerous
territory.

It would seem to me that Epicurus might have used the word "extended" rather than "condensed" and meant pretty much the same thing, as what he seems to be talking about is "filling the experience" so that there's nothing sensed/felt except the pleasure that is under consideration.

Likewise the word translated as "every" -- would that be the same as "each" or "any" in this context?

What I am reading into this is pretty much something to the effect of:

If any single pleasure were to so expand/extend in time, and be felt throughout the whole organism, so that in terms of both time and intensity the organism felt nothing but this single pleasure, then the full experience of that pleasure would be no different than the full experience of any other pleasure. And as a result, for example, if the pleasure of eating an apple filled the entire human experience and crowded out every other feeling for the life of the person, then the person would never have any need for anything other than eating that apple.

It seems to me that its obvious that pleasures do differ in intensity, and in the duration over which we experience them. And I would think that they differ in many other respects as well, EXCEPT for the unifying point (and this is what I gather is what DeWitt is talking about in "Unity of pleasure") that all pleasures are the same in this one respect -- THEY FEEL GOOD.

Regardless of whether what I am saying is correct, I think we need to dig into the implications of the statement not only in respect of time and intensity, but in other terms as well. And we need to think about what it could mean to imply that sex and eating a cookie would not differ from each other if they filled the entire human experience. And we also need to keep in mind that when something doesn't appear to make pretty clear sense, we need to scrutinize various options for translating the text, or even question whether the text is really intact.

Post by “Cassius” of March 27, 2019 at 2:13 PM

One good place for the textual analysis is this: http://wiki.epicurism.info/Principal_Doctrine_9/

I don't always agree with the Epicurism wiki perspective, but in this case I do think it makes sense that "Epicurus presents here a logical defense for his belief that the various pleasures are in an important sense independent: if, he hypothesizes, all pleasures could be somehow "condensed", so that their sum total could be experienced all at the same time, then one pleasure would not differ from any other. Yet the pleasures do differ, Epicurus implies, since they cannot be thus condensed -- another syllogism by negative hypothesis, demonstrating that the opposite is in fact true."

I definitely agree that Epicurus regularly uses syllogisms by negative hypothesis on a regular basis. And as the last part of the analysis indicates, there is probably some complicated context involved here.

Post by “Elayne” of March 27, 2019 at 5:00 PM

Cassius, that throws a completely different light on it! How interesting. If so, that would help with one thing I thought of today on a 3 hr round trip drive to a meeting, about what appears to be a specificity of pleasures.

My thought was-- Epicurus gave specific pleasures to remove specific pains. For instance, PD 2 is to remove the pain of anxiety about death, which allows pleasure in living; PD 6 is to encourage planning for one's safety, with the pleasure of feeling safe; PD 35 advises us to avoid secretly breaking the law to avoid future pain, etc.

Epicurus does not say things like "go ahead and break the law because you can always eat cake later and the taste pleasure will cancel out your worries" or "if you are cold, remember your past pleasures."

The only case I can think of where the recommended action was not specific was at his death. If he had morphine, I feel like he would have used it. Since he could not directly remove the pain, he focused on pleasant memories instead, a wise move.

However, if the pleasure from tasting cake was as intense as the pleasure from escaping death, as long lasting as the knowledge of peace and safety, and could also be spread over the whole body including the amygdala, then eating cake (or whatever else is easy) would be the only thing one ever needed to do.

So if he was really emphasizing that it won't work like that, this would encourage people to be specific with their pleasures for removing and preventing pain.

This is not like what I see people do around me. They do thi:s "I'm worried about my job so I'll go shopping."

Post by “Cassius” of March 27, 2019 at 6:55 PM

> Quote from Elayne
>
> The only case I can think of where the recommended action was not specific was at his death. If he had morphine, I feel like he would have used it.

I think I have heard Elli talk about how the warm wine he drank was intended to be in that department, but my personal knowledge of alcohol is very limited so maybe Elli has info from other sources about what they used in ancient Greece as pain-killers.

> Quote from Elayne
>
> However, if the pleasure from tasting cake was as intense as the pleasure from escaping death, as long lasting as the knowledge of peace and safety, and could also be spread over the whole body including the amygdala, then eating cake (or whatever else is easy) would be the only thing one ever needed to do.

Yes, and that is exactly how I interpret PD10!

> Quote from Elayne
>
> Epicurus gave specific pleasures to remove specific pains

Yes I think that is excellent analysis. I feel sure that if we had more of the texts, many of them would be devoted to practical advice like this. It would not be like Epicurus to leave the discussion of anything at an abstract level, he would tie it to specific observations with which we are familiar. That's why I view the letter to Menoecus, as DeWitt says, as an extremely high-level summary that is technically correct as written, but which is tied tightly to the details from which it was derived, which is how it avoids becoming so ambiguous as to be meaningless. And the loss of those details, plus the flood of propaganda to the contrary, is why so many people have a hard time with the absence of pain discussion. It makes perfect sense if you keep the rest of the details in mind, but sounds bizarre, and is interpretable in bizarre ways, if you don't keep it connected to its foundation.