

Tim O'Keefe's "Epicurean Guide To Christmas" (An Article And Responses)

Post by "Don" of December 29, 2021 at 11:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

A lot of very good people ARE in danger of looking only to "tranquility" - to "rest" - to passivity, and to other and more darker forms of resignation that border on "giving up" everything in life just for the sake of "absence of pain."

While I agree that some may misinterpret "tranquility" and equate it with passivity, that does a disservice to idea of rest, relaxation, and re-energizing. That's not Epicurus's fault. I agree that that's a Stoic and Academic (in both senses of the word) misinterpretation. Epicurus's "tranquility of the mind" is not a passive numbness or unconsciousness or anesthesia. It's a *pleasurable experience* not a lack of feeling. It is experienced with the mind, just as aponia is experienced as relaxation and "freedom from pain" and experienced by the body. That's why Epicurus touts:

Quote

The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection for the health of the body and for the tranquility of the mind, that is for our physical and our mental existence, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For the sake of this, we do everything in order to neither be in bodily or mental pain nor to be in fear or dread; and so, when once this has come into being around us, it sets free all of the calamity, distress, and suffering of the mind, seeing that the living being has no need to go in search of something that is lacking for the good of our mental and physical existence.

It's not numbness that is the goal here, it is that feeling of complete pleasure that comes from being free of all distress and suffering of body and mind. To be filled with pleasure, head to toe, body and mind... The limit of pleasure, as if living the life of a god. We take personal responsibility to make choices and rejections to bring this about. To paraphrase, when the health of the body and the tranquility (ataraxia) of the mind has "come into being," that is, when we are filled with pleasure (which is what aponia and ataraxia are!), we are free of all distress and suffering precisely because we are filled with pleasure. That's not something to hide under a bushel. That's a feature, not a bug.

I also have to say your "war footing" sounds exhausting! 🤔 Whew! I know where you're coming from - and I applaud your efforts - and providing an alternative to the Stoic manly-man

look-at-my-virtue i-take-cold-showers mindset is a laudable goal, but I go back to [some of the characteristics of the sage](#) when this comes up. I do agree we're "fighting" an "uphill battle" against the minimalist, 'freedom from pain' academic interpretations, but all those struggle, battle, war, fighting metaphors are making me tired. I will say I can't believe "resistance is futile" (There's your Star Trek reference 😊) or I wouldn't have gone to the trouble of writing up my Menoikeus notes and posting them. But even Epicurus took rest in the Garden from time to time, took time to celebrate festivals, to commemorate friends at shared meals... Then took up pen and papyrus and fired off diatribes against rival schools and wrote encouragements to friends and students. Breathe in and out, attack and retreat, rest and engage.