The Meaning of the Greek Word "Aponia"

Post by “Don” of December 3, 2023 at 11:33 PM

For aponia, we can take a look at LSJ:

Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἀπονία

non-exertion, laziness

freedom from pain (Epicurus)****[see PS note at bottom]*

Xenophon, in Cyropaedia: And so, when people are bad only because of laziness and indolence (βλακείᾳ καὶ ἀπονίᾳ), I believe that they, like drones, damage their associates only by the cost of their keeping. But those who are poor companions in toil, and also extravagant and shameless in their desire for any advantage, these are likely also to lead others to what is vicious; for they are often able to demonstrate that vice does gain some advantage. And so we must weed out such men at any cost.

Plutarch, in Romulus: They also applied themselves to generous occupations and pursuits, not esteeming sloth and idleness (ἀπονίαν) generous, but rather bodily exercise, hunting, running, driving off robbers, capturing thieves, and rescuing the oppressed from violence. For these things, indeed, they were famous far and near.

Aretaeus, De causis et signis acutorum morborum (lib. 1)

This is what we call Peripneumonia, being an inflammation of the lungs, with acute fever, when they are attended with heaviness of the chest, freedom from pain, provided the lungs alone are inflamed; for they are naturally insensible (απονος), being of loose texture, like wool. But branches of the aspera arteria are spread through them, of a cartilaginous nature, and these, also, are insensible (απονος); muscles there are nowhere, and the nerves are small, slender, and minister to motion. This is the cause of the insensibility to pain (απονος). But if any of the membranes, by which it is connected with the chest, be inflamed, pain also is present; respiration bad, and hot; they wish to get up into an erect posture, as being the easiest of all postures for the respiration.

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And remember aponia is a "not/un" + ponos.

Ponos carries the meaning in Ancient Greek of "pain" but that's woefully inadequate.

Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, πόνος

work, esp. hard work, toil, in Hom. mostly of the toil of war, μάχης π. the toil of battle; generally, toil, labour

stress, trouble, distress, suffering

pain, esp. physical; distd. from λύπη (pain in general) (see the use of lype in Philodemus above)

So when the word a+ponia is being used, we can't just think of pain like a sprained ankle or upset stomach. To my reaading, it refers to the physical components (which *can* include the mind since it is connected to the physical body, the sarkos) working without exertion, to be free from distress, suffering, trouble in the physical body. All that rolled into one succinct word.

****PS: Note: In thinking about this more, it seems to me that LSJ provides the "freedom from pain" definition and attributes it to Epicurus because that is the usual paraphrase used by academic translators. To my reading, Epicurus is using the word as its literal meaning given in the connotations of a+ponos.*