

Opening Discussion of Kelly Arenson's "Health And Happiness In Plato And Epicurus"

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Funny thing, I've been reading Health Hedonism: Why feeling good Is good for you! by Erica Oberg.

It's not a philosophical book but rather an argument for pursuing pleasure in various areas of one's life. Some quotes that may be of interest:

The ancient Greeks, particularly the Epicureans, understood hedonism as an intentional and balanced pursuit of pleasure. They recognized that sustainable pleasure requires both wisdom and moderation. Their philosophical framework emphasized the relationship between pleasure and virtue, suggesting that genuine satisfaction arises from choices that align with personal values and ethical principles. This perspective counters the modern tendency to equate pleasure with excess, reminding us that true joy comes not from fleeting highs but from habits that support long- term well- being. Health isn't just about the absence of disease. It is about the presence of joy and the ability to embrace life's pleasures in a way that enhances vitality rather than diminishes it. Contemporary psychological research has validated this perspective as well, showing that activities consonant with core values provide more profound and lasting satisfaction than purely sensory experiences. In other words, pleasure that aligns with your values, whether through connection, creativity, or self- care, contributes not only to shortterm happiness but also to your overall sense of purpose and vitality. Rather than viewing pleasure as a reward to be earned through suffering, you can recognize it as an essential aspect of human experience that, when integrated thoughtfully, enhances rather than compromises health and well- being.

The interplay between pleasure and pain profoundly influences how you handle life's challenges and recover from difficulties. While many people try to avoid all discomfort, understanding the complementary nature of these experiences reveals an important truth: some degree of challenge often enhances your appreciation of positive moments. For example, the satisfaction of completing a difficult project or mastering a new skill feels particularly sweet precisely because of the effort required. Your nervous system naturally learns from both pleasant and challenging experiences, using each as a reference point for future situations. After facing and overcoming moderate stress, you often discover an enhanced capacity for enjoying positive experiences. Consider how a challenging hike makes the view from the summit more rewarding or how working through a difficult conversation can deepen a relationship. These experiences demonstrate how temporary discomfort can lead to more meaningful satisfaction.

Learning to accept temporary discomfort while working toward meaningful goals marks an important aspect of personal growth. This ability develops gradually through experiences that show you the connection between effort and reward. Each time you persist through a challenge and reach your goal, you build confidence in your capacity to handle future difficulties. This growing resilience makes it easier to embrace both the pleasant and challenging aspects of pursuing what matters to you.

Science makes clear that pleasure is more than mere indulgence, but also provides essential support for physical health, emotional resilience, and cognitive function. Armed with this understanding, you can approach the pursuit of hedonism not as a guilty pleasure but as a legitimate guiding principle to create a balanced, joyful, healthy life.

I think that these are the most directly applicable quotes for our purposes. I'm only about a quarter of the way through the book, but I couldn't resist adding it to this thread... even though it should probably be moved elsewhere. So far, I'd recommend the book to anyone who's into good health through pursuing pleasure. Originally, I assumed this would be another book that offered a modern interpretation of Epicurean ideas without any acknowledgement, so discovering these quotes made me smile. She doesn't profess to be an Epicurean but she seems to me to know the subject pretty well.