

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

Post by "Cassius" of July 31, 2026 at 4:41 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I'm getting it via interlibrary loan soon.

OMG.

Don, you and I and Joshua and many others here have done a creditable job and I'm not going to apologize for what we've done, because I think we're on the right track.

But what little we've done to comment on [Philebus](#) and Plato has been woefully incomplete.

I don't know where Arenson ends up yet (other than skimming the conclusion) so I can't say that we'll agree with all of her conclusions, but she's done in this book what we've needed to do for a long time -- go over in detail the arguments against pleasure not only in the [Philebus](#) but also in the Republic, and then go through Aristotle's tentative pushback.

Aristotle long before Epicurus had rejected this stupid and woefully insufficient "replenishment" theory of pleasure, which is tied to that cursed "process" and becoming vs being" argument which Aristotle also rejected. We've been talking around Epicurus' rejection of the same thing without getting the full picture in view of how central this "becoming is inferior to being" argument, and the citations she's collected will help us get much closer to where we need to be.

I think I can safely predict that neither you nor most of us here are going to find this to be an "enjoyable" book - at least in the sense of Emily Austin's "Living For Pleasure" because it's highly technical. But the background she provides is going to - I hesitate to say "revolutionize" but something on the same order - how we need to be discussing these issues.

A major difficulty is that she's doing what all academics do - presenting the various arguments without taking strong and immediate positions on which are correct. And many of us aren't going to be able to wade through it.

She covers much of the same ground as Gosling and Taylor, but they were even more frustratingly non-committal as they waded through it. Arenson is being considerably more clear in the implications of what's going on. And Socrates and Plato are just abominations who deserve to be exposed for the folly or maliciousness of their arguments, not simply viewed as being "clever" -- which itself appears to be a key word.

All this denunciation of pleasure as not the true good because it is a "process" rather than an "end" is definitely "clever" - but it's cleverness in the employment of something very much to be rejected.

I have a long way to go before finishing, and this is definitely not going to be a book for "everyone." But it's exactly the resource that those of us who are really trying to work through this need.

It is highly irritating to me that this has been out for over five years without me spending more time on it long ago.

That's a large part of why all this has to be a team effort.