

Glossary - What is the Epicurean Definition of "Pleasure?"

Post by "Cassius" of January 14, 2020 at 7:02 PM

Yes that (the focus on tranquility / ataraxia / peace of mind as some unique kind of highest pleasure) is a common assertion that I reject, Mike, and I think you will find that Dewitt states it considerably differently. In fact I do not believe that either ataraxia or aponia are "kinds of pleasure." I believe they are adverbs that describe ways / contexts in which pleasure (ordinary pleasures of all kind) are experienced. In other words, the best way to experience any pleasure is "without distraction" (ataraxia) and "without pain" (aponia).

An illustration I would give would be applicable to any pleasure, but let's just choose "dancing." The best way to experience dancing would be not to be distracted from dancing (don't fall, don't bump into others, don't get called away to do something else) and without any pain mixed in (don't be distracted thinking about painful thoughts) while you are dancing.

I think that is the obvious and commonsensical interpretations of those words, and I think Epicurus was nothing if not common-sensical about the way he thought.

These people who elevate "ataraxia" to something unique in itself are basically playing the katastematic pleasure game of suggesting there is something different and better than pleasure as ordinarily understood.

If I recall correct this is where Elayne's article discusses "fancy pleasure."

And this is related I think to DeWitt's discussion of the "unity of pleasure." All pleasure is unified in that it "feels pleasurable" which is what makes it pleasure. With such a sweeping definition there is no room for some kind of "special pleasure" which is so uniquely the best that it is of a different type than the rest of pleasure.

Again, the unifying characteristic of all pleasure (and in fact the only common characteristic that describes all pleasures) is that it "feels good." So to repeat there's no unique experience of painlessness that has a feeling of it's on. Also on this point is the Wenham article, which focuses on pleasure as an "experience." So it is obvious and saying nothing new to say that pleasure is best experienced without interruptions, and without pain.