

# EPICURUS ON PLEASURE, A COMPLETE LIFE, AND DEATH: A DEFENCE - ALEX VOORHOEVE

Post by "Don" of July 27, 2022 at 11:29 PM

From the conclusion of the 2nd paper.

This seems to me not a bad argument for the importance of tranquility (ataraxia) in an Epicurean life. It's NOT a tranquility of living in a cave. It is an unassailable position from which to experience all the "pleasures of daily life in their most vivid form." It is a perspective on life. It is acquired from a right understanding of nature and our place in it. It is a tranquility that makes us self-reliant in the face of adversity. It is the tranquility that allows us to understand death truly is nothing to us.

As I said, I don't agree with all the author's points, but I find his support and reasons for tranquility refreshing in the face of most authors simply asserting a "tranquility is the only goal by itself" thesis. This author gives more of a why.

*First, as argued in Section 2, its (the tranquil life's) joys are varied and include the pleasures of daily life in their most vivid form.*

*Second, Epicureanism is based on the idea that lives that are not tranquil are typically unhappy: due to false religious beliefs, fear of death, and wanting more than they can be confident of securing, most ordinary people are beset with worry.*

*Third, Epicureans hold that the pleasures of tranquillity are valuable because they are produced by inquiry into nature and the best way to live, by crafting our desires accordingly, and by living so that these desires are unlikely to be thwarted. As such, they are an achievement of reason, and one that, as we have seen, leaves luck only a modest role in shaping our lives. The Epicurean tranquil life is therefore autonomous, in the sense that it involves being guided by our reasoned view of the world and our conception of the good and accomplishing what we set out to achieve.*

*Finally, as Epicurus claims in the passage just quoted from Key Doctrines 20-1, once we have attained tranquillity, our lives are complete. After all, tranquillity is meant to be attainable even when death is imminent. Death must therefore not thwart any strongly held desires of the serene Epicurean. Once we have attained peace of mind, the very desire to remain serene must therefore be a purely conditional desire. That is, as good Epicureans, once we have attained tranquillity, we will want to spend any further time alive in this condition, but we will not want to stay alive in order to remain in it. If we then make the further assumption that something can be bad for a thoughtful, informed adult only if it frustrates a desire of theirs, then it follows that, once we have attained peace of mind through sagacious means, death will not be bad for*

*us. A long time alive in a tranquil state will be welcome—because better than a life of misery—but it will not improve our lives over living a shorter time continuously in the tranquil state before dying. As the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus put it: “The one who understands, having grasped that he is capable of achieving everything sufficient for the good life, immediately and for the rest of his life walks*

*about already ready for burial, and enjoys the single day as if it were an eternity” (De Morte XXXVIII.14-19 in Warren 2004, p. 152).*