

Episode One Hundred Thirty-Seven - The Letter to Menoecus 04 - On Death (Part Two)

Post by "Cassius" of August 29, 2022 at 2:49 AM

We do not disagree - that is why I said "full description."

But there are others out there in the world who insist that "tranquility" IS a sufficient description of the Epicurean goal, and that is my reason for the rhetorical question.

Pleasure as defined by normal definitions includes both joy and delight and tranquility. The reverse is not the case in normal or academic discourse - tranquility is not considered to include joy and delight.

As I see it if we want to convey that we value both goals in the online world of discussing Epicurus, the global word which must be emphasized is Pleasure. If we fail to make clear the sweeping definition of Pleasure, the result is that we imply that Tranquility is a separate and equal or even higher goal. At that point we will be indistinguishable from those who consider joy and delight to be second tier goals and that joy and delight are expendable or merely instrumental toward some supposedly higher word.

That's exactly what the elevation of "katastematic pleasure" has done in many cases - dilute and demote the sweeping nature of the word "pleasure." And whether we like it or not, people who focus on "tranquility" and "katastematic pleasure" as replacements for "pleasure" are everywhere in modern online discussion of Epicurus, so this is an issue to keep constantly in mind.

Every time a young person reads somewhere that Epicurus held the highest good to be "Tranquility" or "Ataraxia," another opportunity to reach someone for the message of Epicurus is jeopardized. Some take the time to get to the bottom of the issue, but my belief is that many do not. Had it not been for my reading DeWitt rather than Wikipedia and the Academics, I would have walked away from Epicurus just like Nietzsche did, and this website would not exist.

(And that's not to equate my level of perception as being anywhere Nietzsche's, but only to observe that I would consider his ultimate assessment of Epicurus as insufficient would be correct, did I not take this position about the relationship between pleasure and tranquility.)

It makes sense to pursue tranquility for the sake of experiencing Pleasure without disruption or distraction, but it does not make sense to pursue pleasure for the sake of "absence of disturbance." In the former, Pleasure is clearly communicated to be the goal, and we can all pursue Pleasure in whatever form we find pleasurable. In the latter, no clear goal is conveyed at all, and we are left to look elsewhere for a clear goal. (And this "left to look elsewhere is IMHO

exactly why that formulation is so popular.)

The fact that you (Don) thought it appropriate to clarify what I was saying in the question shows that this is an issue where we have no consensus form of communication even here at EpicureanFriends. By no means do I intend to deprecate the value of tranquility to life - I always consider pleasure to include tranquility.

But outside of here there is a consensus - and the consensus is that Tranquility rather than Pleasure is what Epicurus held to be the ultimate goal. And with that switch in words comes a huge transvaluation in meaning.

To me that is why it is very good that we continue to have this back and forth discussion, and why I am glad you raise it. Otherwise the point would be lost on all but the very few who really dig into the reasons for the terminology issues. If this website is to do anything for the world of discussion of Epicurus on the internet, it will be in keeping this issue front and center.