

# Another mainstream article claiming ataraxia is the goal

Post by "Cassius" of September 22, 2022 at 4:55 PM

That article certainly fits the classic pattern:

1 - Epicurus held pleasure to be the goal.

2 - But when he said "pleasure" he really meant "absence of pain."

3 - That means we should above all our single-minded goal should be to minimize pain - come hell or high water, we should make all our decisions on avoiding the slighted pain or disturbance whatsoever!

4 - We now see that Epicurus was an ascetic and really didn't mean anything about pleasure at all.

5 - We can't achieve that goal of being painless, so we can't be good Epicureans, but the nearest way we can simulate the goal is to live an absolutely minimalist lifestyle.

6 - And in doing so we'll find a way to mention how much we like Martha Nussbaum's pro-Stoic book "Therapy of Desire."

That item six is especially key! 😊

I think in implying that we might have lost the "therapeutic" portions of the Epicurean texts you're connecting to what these mainstream articles imply. In contrast to focusing on pain, I would say to them that the entire philosophy IS therapeutic if you rightly consider that the goal is NOT "absence of pain" but is instead a life that is as fully pleasurable as possible (which means one that is undiluted by any more pain than is necessary). And that means - as Epicurus explicitly said - that we will sometimes choose pain when it makes more pleasure possible, or avoids more pain. Once that is recognized there's no way to come to the conclusion that "avoiding pain" is a complete statement of the goal.

I doubt very many ancient Greeks or Romans really had a hard time understanding this, and it really takes an attitude of playing games with words to make the issue sound difficult. Cicero and his lawyerly arguing set the pattern of taking the issue out of context, but if you keep in mind that the goal of therapy would not be to "minimize pain" but instead "to bring the person back to health" and you understand also (as you stated) that every human life involves some degree of pain just to survive, then I think the issues clarify pretty readily.