

Is pleasure as the natural goal of life falsifiable?

Post by "Don" of February 9, 2023 at 7:06 AM

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The difference is that some pain is unavoidable: an Epicurean would suffer greatly at a loss of a child or a friend and ataraxia is not a goal in this case. A stoic would have to control the suffering by reminding self that virtue is all that matters.

And I agree. Philodemus is very clear that people will - and should - feel the bite of grief at the loss of a loved one or feel the bite of anger when purposefully wronged by someone. We are all human with natural human reactions. But he also wrote that an Epicurean will not let those feelings overwhelm themselves. The "strength of mind" allows one to eventually put it all in context, to understand that the loved one no longer exists and does not feel pain, is not separated from them in some afterlife, and that pleasant memories of them can be recalled and enjoyed. In that case, it is not a Stoic indifference to the loved one's passing. It is a clear-eyed acceptance of reality, both the bite of grief and the eventual - maybe even a long time - acceptance of the world as it is. Same way with anger. We feel that bite if we are wronged, not a stoic indifference. But we don't fire off that email in the heat of anger. We make choices with an eventual calm mind that will lead to a pleasurable outcome.

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ataraxia is to be achieved by trying not to put yourself in situations that could cause mental pain for the sake of unnatural and unnecessary desires: e.g. politics, power, excessive wealth

Ataraxia is achieved by working through and internalizing the antidotes to fear and anxiety: [death is nothing to us](#); the gods present no reason to fear them; some things do happen by chance; we *can* make prudent decisions to lead a pleasurable life, even deciding sometimes to undergo painful experiences if they lead eventually to pleasure; we are not constrained by Fate; etc. Ataraxia is a source of pleasure within ourselves available at all times. It's true that we need to be careful about putting ourselves in situations that cause mental pain, but avoiding things does not create ataraxia. We gain ataraxia/ tranquility by applying Epicurus's antidotes - his philosophical medicine - to our fearful, anxiety-ridden minds. Epicureanism is not a philosophy of avoidance or timidity or refusal to engage with the world. It is a philosophy of personal responsibility and embracing the world as it is, not as we wish it to be or not as some kind of obstacle or show for us to demonstrate our superior virtue.