

# The Ethics of Epicurus and its Relation to Contemporary Doctrines by Jean-Marie Guyau. Edited by Testa and Ansell-Pearson, translated by Testa

Post by "Godfrey" of May 2, 2023 at 11:04 PM

For me, this book isn't about climbing aboard. There seems to be more nuance to his position than what that summary indicates, and that's what makes it interesting to me.

## [Quote from Guyau](#)

Finally, another strongly positive term that is employed by Epicurus confirms our interpretation: it is the term *hugieia*; that is, the healthy and good proportionate state of the being as a whole, body and soul, in order and harmony. This is undoubtedly the happiness that the Epicurean sage finds within himself once he has eliminated all trouble. 51

This sounds to me like homeostasis, in current terms.

Further:

## [Quote from Guyau](#)

51 ...That which also helps refuting Ravaisson's position is the consequences that he extracts from his hypothesis: 'If the end goal of happiness is not suffering or perceiving any pain, doesn't this mean that what is most desirable for man is to die - and, what is more, to never have come into existence in the first place?' (Essai sur la Métaphysique d'Aristote, II, 113)... Moreover, Ravaisson writes, 'Pleasure is nothing but the end of pain, and whenever pain comes to an end only by means of death itself.' - Believing that Epicurus did not see these consequences or simply accepted them means attributing to him incredible naivety and absurdity. Let us look, by means of contrast, to a text by Epicurus: 'Death is indifferent to us, because all good and all evil reside in the action of feeling, and death is the privation of sensibility...' (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, X, 124). How could one [after reading this passage] still defend the thesis according to which Epicurus thought that insensibility and negation found in *sterēsis* (privation) consisted in achievement and perfection, or the *sumplērōsis* (plenitude) of the good? Neither insensibility nor death are good for Epicurus, and he clearly responds to all those who attribute this idea to him."

After giving Epicurus' view of death, this:

### [Quote from Guyau](#)

" 'From the moment when we are freed from pain, we enjoy the deliverance itself and exemption from every kind of constraint.' (Cicero, De finibus, I, xi, 37; I, xvii, 56) To live in freedom, in rest and harmony with oneself, to have the inner feeling that one lives, this is supreme pleasure, in comparison to which all the others are but so many changing forms. Forever the same, this pleasure can exist independently and subsist above all others."

Which sounds something like what we often say, that we only have one life to enjoy so we should appreciate and make the most of it. And perhaps another version of homeostasis?

### [Quote from Guyau](#)

It is to restrain and restrict all the fugacious and superficial enjoyments to just one, an indestructible and profound one, which is an enjoyment of life itself. The good, then, is serenity."

I'm not sure that I would equate "an enjoyment with life itself" with "serenity." My focus in this quote was the former, not the latter. And I was again comparing this to homeostasis. The quote itself seems contradictory, so one has to piece together the totality of his argument at look at the wording, knowing that it's a translation from Greek (or Latin) to French to English.

This is one reason why I feel that there's much to get from this book. He says a lot that I agree with, some things that I don't, and many that I need to think about more. It may be a little maddening, but at least for me, it's not a book that you can home in on one sentence or paragraph and draw a final conclusion, but an opportunity to consider the puzzle pieces and perhaps come away with a deeper understanding of my own interpretation even if I don't fully agree with him. There's a lot there to dig into, and he's quite sympathetic to Epicurus. So, another source to be aware of!