

Would You Rather Live For A Week As (1) Epicurus During the Last Week of His Life or (2) An Anonymous Shepherd Laying In The Grass In The Summertime With No Pain At All?

Post by "Cassius" of September 12, 2023 at 9:24 AM

Just by coincidence I see [this article in my daily blast from Academia](#):

Ataraxia: Tranquility at the End

Pascal Massie

In their investigation of "eudaimonia" (happiness, human flourishing) Hellenistic philosophers (i.e., members of the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Skeptic schools) made frequent use of terms that were relatively new in the philosophical lexicon; among others: ataraxia (freedom from disturbance), hēsychia (serenity), tranquillitas and securitas (Seneca and Cicero's Latin translation of euthymia), eustatheia (stability), athambia (quietness), adiaphora (indifference), and apatheia (the condition of being unmoved).

Even though most of them did not simply identify eudaimonia with ataraxia, it still remains that the notion of happiness they proposed took on a new significance because of this emphasis on ataraxia and related notions. At stake is not simply a particular development in the history of ancient philosophy; the issue runs much deeper. It entails a transformation of the very meaning of philosophy. When eudaimonia is determined in terms of ataraxia the very purpose and meaning of philosophy also changes. To be a philosopher is first and foremost a matter of conquering fears and desires and the esteem one should bestow upon a philosophical school depends primarily on its ability to lead us to such an end. In other words, the emergence of ataraxia at the core of ethical discourse is deeply rooted in a renewed understanding of philosophy itself.

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However, during the Hellenistic era three new developments occurred: (a) It is argued that one can measure a philosophical system by its ability to lead its disciples to happiness. Thus, eudaimonia becomes a meta-philosophical criterion. Philosophy is instrumental to happiness just as medicine is instrumental to health. But on this count (b) both Plato and Aristotle have failed. Their followers are no closer to happiness than

nonphilosophers. (c) The solution (if not in full, at least in a significant part) demands that the requirements for happiness be reevaluated. For the Epicureans and the Skeptics eudaimonia calls for the attainment of ataraxia. The Stoics held a rather similar view, although they prefer the term apatheia.

568 What is striking in all these new terms (although not perceptible in most translations) is that the determination of this requirement is, in its linguistic form, mostly negative (a-taraxia, apatheia, a-diaphora). Happiness is not the achievement or the attainment of a human potential; rather, it is a release from worry, anxiety, and disturbance; a liberation that results from the therapeutic examination of our belief⁵⁶⁹. This new focus reveals that the inner conflicts of the soul have become the chief concern since they are now identified as the main obstacle to happiness. Thus, ataraxia seems to name an absence, a lack. Many, following Hegel's pronouncement, have diagnosed this aim of life as a sheer renunciation of the world and a withdrawal into self-satisfaction.