

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 9:31 AM

Here's a particularly interesting passage comparing ataraxia to be a model, not a condition:

Kinetic pleasures for their part remain by definition incomplete for so long as the animal keeps drinking it is still thirsty. In kinetic pleasures one experiences the progressive lessening of pain - which presupposes that some form of pain or discomfort is still there in the first place. By contrast, katastematic pleasures are stable and they are so because they are fundamentally finite in the sense that they repel the infinite frustration of ordinary kinetic desires. "The removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures. Wherever pleasure is present, and as long as it is present, a

feeling of pain, a feeling of distress, or their combination is absent." (D L 10, Maxim 3).

The little clause "as long as it is present" indicates that Epicurus does not posit the stability of katastematic pleasures as everlasting; for this reason the pursuit of ataraxia does not aim at a beatitude that would transcend our mortal condition. A state of supernatural blessedness is not an option. It is true that Epicurean texts often invoke the calm bliss the gods are said to enjoy, but for us the divine is a model, not a destination. The end of human life must be compatible with the human condition but this condition entails being subjected to needs and lacks, the awareness of which constitutes an experience of pain and their satisfaction an experience of kinetic pleasure.

But first what could it be to experience ataraxia? The Epicurean ataraxia is not simply a "state of mind" (pace Striker); it is a state of being that depends on the discovery of another form of pleasure, the pleasure of being rather than the pleasure of possessing or consuming. To pursue the arithmetical analogy, one could say that for all positive numbers there corresponds a negative number; 0 however admits of no opposite. Of course ataraxia is not a degree zero since, as we saw earlier, it is already pleasure and Epicurus' insistence on the idea that ataraxia is a form of pleasure rules out a common objection according to which one who follows such an ethics would live a life of indifference. Instead, ataraxia corresponds to the pleasure of being that comes from knowing one's limits.

(Unfortunately there is no real concluding paragraph that summarizes the entire article.)

Note: A very good line:

[Quote from Article](#)

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