

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 "Don" of September 12, 2023 at 11:30 PM

Great find on the Massie paper, [Cassius](#) !

I've read the Epicurean section specifically but should read the rest, too.

However, I do find several excerpts very interesting, including:

Quote

Not only are kinetic pleasures unavoidable and should be welcomed, but in a sense katastematic pleasures are paradoxically the target that all quests for pleasure (even kinetic ones) secretly aims at. To see this, we need to ask whether the ultimate object of desire is really an object. Pleasure is commonly understood as delight

in something, enjoyment of something. In other words, pleasure assumes an object and construes itself as a relation to this object. ... the common experience of pleasure is one in which desire recognizes its dependence on an object that, even when consumed, remains an [alterity](#). For this reason all our common desires seek the impossible since they seek the unlimited. Epicurus' answer, articulated in the concept of ataraxia, consists in seeking a pleasure without object, a pleasure without anything outside of itself; true happiness can only be construed in terms of self-sufficiency.

With self-sufficiency, the need for another disappears insofar as one traces a limit within which one can maintain one's own existence. As we saw, the problem inherent to any attempt to fulfill one's desires is the endlessness of desire and ataraxia is meant to be the answer, the only form of pleasure that ends the madness of desire. Freedom from disturbance and suffering is a matter of putting a halt to the unlimited. This is possible

because there is at least one formula which, in principle, could resolve the conundrum. To resolve the frustration of unsatisfied desire, the seeker of pleasure must discover in herself (in her own very existence), the object of her delight. The pleasure that is found in being (rather than in having or doing) is a pleasure beyond desire because it is a pleasure without object, or, if we must still talk of an object of desire, this object is not

alien to the seeker anymore. Self-sufficiency (autarkeia) is therefore the hallmark of ataraxia and the search

for happiness turns out to be a search for freedom, since it does not depend on anything but itself.

I realize that's a rather lengthy excerpt, but I think it's a novel take on ataraxia as well as the katastematic/kinetic issue. There is nothing wrong with kinetic desires, in fact, they should be "welcomed." But Massie is positing that ataraxia, the katastematic pleasure, is something that only has the person's existence itself, the joy of being, as the source of its delight. I like that idea, and it bumps up against or is adjacent to DeWitt's "the greatest good is life itself" but avoids DeWitt's tautological conundrum since "If life is the greatest good, but the greatest good is that to which everything else points to, so life points to living,, etc." (I've been down this road many times so I'll let it lie there.) Massie has a novel take in that ataraxia is joy in living free from frustration, disturbance, and suffering in the mind. I would still maintain that ataraxia is achieved by getting rid of the fears of god, death, etc., etc., but once those are removed, ataraxia is the joy one gets from *being* in that *state* of freedom from fear, disturbance, etc. The one who is feeling ataraxia is self-sufficient in their own being, while continuing to enjoy the varied pleasures that come along from kinetic pleasures. Again, I like the "swimming in the ocean, surfing on the waves" metaphor that [Godfrey](#) helped refine a while back.

So, did Epicurus experience ataraxia in his last week? Using Massie's approach, I would continue to say yes, to the extent that Epicurus was able to experience anything other than pain.