

Competing Greek Words for Pleasure in the Epicurean Corpus?

Post by “Don” of November 1, 2023 at 12:20 AM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

the source for terpsis: Warren, James (2002). *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University.

This review may be of help to is:

[Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia – Bryn Mawr Classical Review](#)

Quote

The rest of chapter 2 is an analysis of the longest surviving fragment of Democritus, B191. It begins, “Euthymia arises in men through a moderation of joy and a good balance of life.” This confirms, says Warren, “that Democritus is no full-blooded hedonist,” since it advises that we pursue, not “the maximum amount of pleasure,” but only “a moderate amount of terpsis” And what is terpsis? Warren translates it “joy,” and distinguishes it from “pleasure” (hêdonê) as follows: whereas a feeling of pleasure “might or might not be beneficial,” terpsis “is a feeling we can accept as objectively good.” I find this implausible and would urge instead that Democritus’ distinction between terpsis and hêdonê anticipates Epicurus’ distinction between “joy” (chara) and “pleasure”: joy is the mental state that has pleasure as its intentional object. (On this, see my article “Epicurus on the telos”, *Phronesis* 38 [1993] 281-321.) Warren cites B4: “Joy (terpsis) and lack of joy are boundary-markers of what is and is not beneficial.” But Democritus is not saying here that joy is the feeling of pleasure that we get from what, being truly beneficial, is objectively good. He is saying that what is good (i.e., beneficial) must be measured in terms of what causes joy. And that sounds to me a lot like the moderate hedonism of Epicurus.

So, it appears Democritus uses terpsis, not Epicurus.