

EPICURUS ON PLEASURE, A COMPLETE LIFE, AND DEATH: A DEFENCE - ALEX VOORHOEVE

Post by "Godfrey" of December 28, 2024 at 4:47 AM

I just read the paper from the first post in this thread... guess I'm a little behind in my reading! I didn't remember this thread; I read the paper and then found the thread. Quite an interesting paper.

Quote from Cassius

I would say that the entire question of having a "complete" life is troublesome. I've probably used that phrasing but I'm not sure how much sense it really makes, and referring to a life as "complete" or "less than complete" smacks of a more absolutist attitude than I would expect Epicurus to take.

I'm ok with words like "full" and "pure" to the extent that they refer to quantities that are 100% of the respective issue. But "complete" (at least some of the modern interpretations of it) seems to go beyond that, and imply a certain list of activities that everyone should experience in order to call their lives "complete." And I doubt Epicurus would sanction that.

Don do you have thoughts on wording that might bear on "complete

The author used a formulation of the good life from Aristotle, and examined how Epicurus' thinking might map on to that. That seemed to be a starting point of the paper: to compare and contrast the two.

From the second paper, which I haven't read (at least not lately):

[Quote from Don](#)

Third, Epicureans hold that the pleasures of tranquillity are valuable because they are produced by inquiry into nature and the best way to live, by crafting our desires accordingly, and by living so that these desires are unlikely to be thwarted. As such, they are an achievement of reason, and one that, as we have seen, leaves luck only a modest role in shaping our lives. The Epicurean tranquil life is therefore autonomous, in the sense that it involves being guided by our reasoned view of the world and our conception of the good and accomplishing what we set out to achieve.

While I understand the qualms of using the word "tranquillity," I think this quote puts it into a proper context.

And further:

[Quote from Don](#)

What sets Epicurus apart from many hedonists, however, is his idea that the greatest (in the sense of most valuable, or most choiceworthy) pleasures are generated in a state of ataraxia, or tranquillity. This is a condition in which a person is free from physical pain and mental distress.

To me, that gets at an idea of ataraxia (and aponia, although I don't believe the paper mentions that specifically) being the ground on which we can more fully experience other pleasures. Without that ground or foundation, other pleasures are experienced but may be fleeting. With a steady, tranquil mind and healthy body, we are already feeling pleasure, then other pleasures vary our experience.

And I would offer that one can be "tranquil" in activity. It doesn't mean sitting on a cushion, meditating. Or being numb (as some might say, both ancient and modern)!!

This, to me, does a good job of describing the relationship of the pleasure of "tranquillity." Not only does it not come from withdrawal, but it enhances other, more fleeting pleasures.