

# Sunday November 2, 2025 - Zoom Discussion 12:30 PM EST - Continuation of Discussion of Nature of Pleasure

Post by "Eikadistes" of October 27, 2025 at 12:42 PM

Quote

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Quote

I wonder how the most highly regarded English translations render Epicurus's use of the word *Pleasure*. Are they agreed? Is any one of them considered above the others?

*Though language is fluid (and I do think it's helpful to paraphrase), so far as I have found, "pleasure" is the universal, English translation for ἡδονή (hēdoné) found in the academic world of Epicurean scholars. For example, in the (x15) translations of the [Kuriai Doxai that I compiled](#), a declension of hēdoné is used in Key Doctrines 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 18, 19, and 20, and **all** of the translators (including Yonge, Wallace, Hicks, Bailey, de Witt, Geer, Long, Sedley, O' Connor, Inwood, Gerson, Anderson, Makridis, Saint-Andre, Strodach, Mensch, and White) use "pleasure" as their preferred term. This is one of *only a few* Greek words for which all translators (of the Epicurean works) seem to agree.*

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Quote

Does Epicurus' ancient Greek word have a singular meaning or multiple meanings within the context of mental vs physical?

Is his use of the word always consistent without his explaining the distinction between mental and physical meanings?

Hēdoné **always** means "pleasure" as I have seen, and includes *physical* pleasures, *mental* pleasures, *lasting* pleasures, *fleeting* pleasures, *red* pleasures, *blue* pleasures, "me" pleasures, and "you" pleasures. **All** pleasures are implied by and included in the

definition ἡδονή (*hēdonē*). **All pleasure is pleasure:** "If every pleasure were compressed, and eventually existed throughout the whole atomic assembly of the human form or even just the most important parts of one's nature, it would never be possible to distinguish one pleasure from another" (Key Doctrine 9).

For the sake of coherence, I maintain that same conventions in my own translations. As Epíkouros further writes, "no pleasure by itself is evil" (KD 8 ) because "wherever pleasure is, for the time that it is, there is neither discomfort, nor distress, nor both" (KD 3). Since pleasure is not an evil, I feel right defending the word against those who might consider it "tainted".

Now, given that conceptual treatment of pleasure, there are different varieties of *hēdonē*. Principally, he discusses ἀταραξία (*ataraxía*), "impassiveness", which might be seen to correspond with the pure pleasures διανοίᾱς (*dianoías*) "of the mind", and ἀπονία (*aponía*), which might be seen to correspond with the pure pleasure σάρκός (*sarkós*) "of the flesh". Unlike the Kyrenaics, ancient Epicureans maintained that *both* pleasures and pains of the mind were *worse* than both pleasures and pains of the flesh. Still, all pleasures are pleasurable.

He provides us (as I see it) with *at least* 2-4 other qualities of sorts of pleasures: on one axis, pleasures are characterized as being "of the mind" and "of the body", and on another, they are characterized as being either *kinetic* (or "active") or *katastematic*, "stable" or "static":

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Quote

He differs from the [Kyrēnaícs](#) regarding the [definition of] pleasure; for they do not accept the *katastēmatic*<sup>54</sup> [balanced state] but only the [pleasure] in activity; but he [accepts] both, [pleasure] of mind and of body, as he affirms in the [book] *On Choice and Avoidance* and in that *On the End*, and in the first [book] *On the Conduct of Life* and in the *Epistle to the Philosophers* in [Mytilénē](#). So also *Diogénēs* [the Epicurean] in the seventeenth book of his *Epilekta*, and [Mētródōros](#) in the [book] *Timokrátēs*, they say thus: "We then conceive of pleasure both as [kinetic] activity and [katastematic] equilibrium." (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 10.136)

Her further says, "in the [book] *On Choice*, simply says: "Tranquility [[ataraxía](#)]<sup>55</sup> and painlessness [[aponía](#)]<sup>56</sup> are centered<sup>57</sup> pleasures; but the [pleasures of] joy [[kharà](#)]<sup>58</sup> and cheerfulness [[euphronsynē](#)]<sup>59</sup> are seen to [include] action [and] activity", so we are provided with words to further characterize the [1] "active pleasures of the mind", [2] "stable pleasures of the mind", [3] "active pleasures of the flesh", and [4] "stables pleasures of the flesh". As I see it:

1. [ΑΤΑΡΑΞΙΑ](#) or [ἀταραξία](#) (*ataraxía*), the *katastematic* state of painlessness of the mind. ↩

2. [ΑΠΟΝΙΑ](#) or [ἀπονία](#) (*aponía*), the *katastamatic* state of painlessness of the flesh. ↵
3. [ΧΑΡΑ](#) or [χαρά](#) (*kharà*), the *kinetic* act of pleasuring the flesh, meaning “joy”. ↵
4. [ΕΥΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ](#) or [εὐφροσύνη](#) (*euphronsyñē*) the *kinetic* act of pleasuring the mind, “cheer”. ↵

And, of course, we may also see some correspondence between the various pleasures and the types of desires. Natural, and necessary desires usually correspond with pleasures like eating, drinking, and socializing. Natural, but unnecessary desires might correspond with pleasures like sex. Vain desires correspond with pleasures that include building a ballroom to preserve your legacy. While there are differences between pleasures and desires, these help shape our understanding.

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Quote

...considering our discussion today about *Pleasure* and its connotation with shamefulness? [...]

For example, *Pleasure* is such a loaded word! When [Joshua](#) said it should not be associated with shame, it resonated with me a lot.

Epíkouros understood that "pleasure" had a bad rap, and he saw a need to add a nuance for those who might misunderstand. So, he explicitly explains to Menoikeus that,

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*Then when we say the goal is Pleasure, we are not counting the pleasures of the debauched and those lying sick with enjoyment, and those who, not knowing and not acknowledging or having barely received [advantage] from considering, but rather [seeking] neither suffering throughout the body nor grieving throughout the soul." (Epíkouros, Epistle to Menoikeus 10.131).*

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Quote

I wonder if his followers in the varied parts of the eastern Mediterranean all deduced the same meaning(s) he intended with his usage of the Greek word for *Pleasure*?

In general, *hēdoné* was seen by Epicurean opponents as the root of all evil. They weren't shy about it. Everyone from Platonists, to Cynics, to Stoics, to Christians contextualized *hēdoné* as the dishonorable goal of shallow people with weak minds. *Everyone* rejected his categorization

of "mental impassiveness" as a "pleasure", including his fellow hedonists, the Kyrenaics.

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Quote

Robert wondered if "re-branding" our word choice would be useful.

I think the Hegemon gives us some attitude on this idea: "*Frankly at least [as a] student-of-nature, I would prefer to deliver what is useful to all humanity, even if no one is likely to take notice, than profit from affirming the firm doctrines that fell from the side of widespread approval.*" ([Vatican Saying](#) 29). He also says, "*Never did I reach to please the masses, for truly what pleases them, I did not understand, but what I understood was far away from their perception*" ([Usener](#) 187).