

My personal, cursory interpretation of Epicurus. Please feel free to correct me.

Post by "Daniel188" of December 22, 2025 at 4:29 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

1. You appear to me the type of person to whom the DeWitt book would appeal and be very valuable. If you don't have it I hope you will get it.

I will try to get this book. Thank you.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The sentence or phrase "pleasure characterized by ataraxia or freedom from pain" I would say will need lots of elaboration because I would argue that all pleasure "is" absence of pain and placing "ataraxia in a central role without elaboration can lead to very dangerous tangents. Nature gives us only pleasure and pain, not ataraxia.

I agree. My perspective is that you can't have ataraxia without pleasure. In his letter to Menoiceus, Epicurus states that there are only two feelings: pain and pleasure. If we eliminate pain, we automatically achieve pleasure. Pain is then the body's demand for pleasure. For example, if our head itches, we feel the pain of desire, which tells us to scratch it. By eliminating this pain by scratching, we automatically derive pleasure from it.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Same comment as above. Abstractions formed properly are very important and even necessary. Epicurean philosophy itself is an abstraction. It's probably more a question of how the abstractions is formed than the fact of being an abstraction.

I actually hadn't thought this through. I was more referring to abstract goals that aren't grounded in feelings. Let's look at virtues in the Stoic sense, for example. It's really difficult to figure out what "virtuous action" means specifically without considering some hard touchstone, like pleasure. An Epicurean essentially arrives at these things on their own because they know exactly how they feel. Feelings are subjective, so to a large extent, different people can lead happy lives in different ways. This doesn't bother an Epicurean because they don't see their lifestyle as something absolute to which everyone must conform, but as something personal.

The situation is different for people who choose, for example, virtue as a goal. If virtue is a goal, then one can assume that one should act in some objectively determined way, determined by

logic, and everyone should act accordingly. And this is where conflicts arise between different groups, arguing about how to act in accordance with virtue. If you're someone who takes such a goal seriously, you must consider all opinions and try to think them through so as not to accidentally stray and pursue vice instead of virtue. In such a case, you can be left confused and unsure whether you're doing good or bad.

An Epicurean has a clear goal and can easily measure it through their feelings. If the result of their actions is pleasure, they're certain they're doing good; if the result is pain, they know they're doing bad and don't need to spend much time pondering theoretical definitions of virtue or abstract good.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As indicated above I would now say that the better term for the goal is happiness or eudaemonia or Felicity and not ataraxia or even aponia. One of the most clear examples to use to consider that is that Epicurus said his last days were among his happiest but he was not without pain or disturbance. And if he has held "absence of disturbance" to be his primary directive he would have stayed home and tended a fig garden instead of leading a revolutionary philosophical movement that challenged every power structure of his day.

I'll have to think about this. What you're saying sounds reasonable. It's probably more accurate to talk about happiness or eudaimonia. Thank you for your answer.