

Neither "ataraxia" nor "not ataraxia", but "Joy as the goal"

Post by "Don" of May 3, 2026 at 7:35 AM

Great thought-provoking posts, [Matteng](#) and [wbernys](#) . I'll address a couple points in a bit.

For me, there has to be something to the fact that aponia and aponos, in regular popular ancient usage, meant things like non-exertion, laziness; without toil or trouble, free from the necessity of labour. The adverb aponōs shows up in [Herodotus](#) as "without trouble":

Quote

subdue all Hellas without fighting. [2] As long as the Greeks who were previously in accord remained so, it would be difficult even for the whole world to overcome them by force of arms; "but if you do as we advise," said the Thebans, "you will *without trouble* (*aponōs*) be master of all their battle plans. [3] Send money to the men who have power in their cities, and thereby you will divide Hellas against itself; after that, with your partisans to aid you, you will easily subdue those who are your adversaries."

I know Epicurus redefined some words to fit his philosophy, but they were all still in the semantic range of the popular usage. So, while I'm not *entirely* onboard with [wbernys](#) 's point about aponia and ataraxia being synonymous, I do think Epicurus specifically uses them to illustrate katastematic pleasure for a reason, same as his choice of khara and euprosyne as kinetic examples. The reason I'm reluctant to go the synonymous route is that Epicurus has to be pointing out the different kinds or aspects of katastematic pleasure, same for kinetic. It seems to me he's trying to say that there are multiple, numerous kinds of pleasure within the human experience. Broadly speaking, there is pleasure and there is pain. But within those TWO ways - and ONLY TWO ways - of experiencing the world, there are numerous variations.

That said, the nuance of aponia/aponos/aponōs of meaning free from work, exertion, toil, means to me an easy-going, effortless way of being. Surfing on the ocean, untroubled by any turbulent waves. I've seen ataraxia being connected with a calm sea. Maybe aponia could be (and I'm going off on my own here) is effortlessly surfing the waves when they do arise.

Maybe aponia, instead of freedom from pain, would be better thought of as freedom from toil, exertion, work, as in not fighting against one's existence. Effortlessly dealing with choices and rejections, letting the little things flow over you like "water off a duck's back" and "going with the flow." So, maybe serenity isn't a bad choice in the end.

I agree that modern commentators overplay katastematic/kinetic, Epicurus didn't say to pursue one aspect of pleasure only. However, those who would completely discount

katastematic/kinetic as irrelevant, I disagree with as well. Just like the categories of desire, katastematic/kinetic has something to teach us about the multiplicity of pleasure.

[Quote from Matteng](#)

What is the difference between mental aponia and ataraxia ?

Great question. It may be subtle, but there has to be a distinction. The closest I can come is that it's a matter of perspective. Ataraxia is focusing on the lack of disturbance, aponia is focusing on the ability to effortlessly deal with disturbance when it arises.