

Welcome Max Duboff

Post by “Max DuBoff” of June 30, 2026 at 1:11 AM

Thanks for this note, Cassius! Yes, I'm very glad for your opinionated-ness, as you put it. And I wanted to share my papers as part of that project: I'm very interested in your feedback (including objections), and I don't consider my interpretations of Epicurus to be the only plausible ones.

I am a bit uncertain what you mean (both in this note and in some of the guiding posts on this site) in distinguishing tranquility from happiness or pleasure. Tranquility is a pleasure but not the only pleasure. At the same time (and here I'm wading into a perhaps controversial interpretation), tranquility is the only pleasure upon which blessedness, i.e., a perfect or complete life, is based.* I take this to be the straightforward reading of Letter to Menoeceus 128 and also to be clear from [Principal Doctrines](#) 3 and 20; if there were another pleasure that could improve tranquility, a human life could never be perfect/complete (PD 20), and it couldn't be the limit of the magnitude of pleasure (PD 3).

Perhaps what you mean is that the absence of pain will not be experienced as simply an absence, both because it's itself good to experience, and because it'll almost always go along with a number of other pleasures. So tranquility is the goal of life, but we don't need to rule out everything else in order to focus on it. If that's what you mean, then yes, I agree.

PD 20 is a lode star for my (sometimes controversial) interpretation; I take very seriously the argument that, for pleasure to ever be perfect, it must not be additive. But if that's true, then the prime directive is tranquility.

Great points about religion! Definitely with you on that; we need to take the gods seriously as exemplars of happiness, whether they literally exist or not. (And certainly they don't affect us no matter what.)

More to say about death and sex/marriage, of course, but yes, I thought you'd be sympathetic to my general approach (as I am to yours).

*I tend to refer to blessedness rather than happiness because "happiness" is quite nebulous. "Blessedness" is a bit nebulous too but at least connotes the life of the gods. By the way, I think Cicero's biggest mistake in On Moral Ends 2 is conflating the good with the goal of life; for Epicurus, there are goods which don't contribute to the goal of life.