

Welcome Max Duboff

Post by “Don” of July 1, 2026 at 11:22 AM

(Sorry for the length of this. It grew in the telling, so to speak 😊)

Again, welcome aboard our little boat here (in keeping with [U163](#)).

[Quote from Max DuBoff](#)

I might recommend Tim O'Keefe's Epicureanism book over DeWitt.

DeWitt can also sometimes be a slog in his writing style and I've stated elsewhere that I don't like his fondness for reading too much into scanty evidence. I use him sparingly myself, and I like his academic papers much more than *Epicurus and His Philosophy*. Throwing no shade on DeWitt's fans here, but I've always found him difficult to embrace. I give him 10/10 on his passion for Epicurus though!

My go-to recommendation for anyone looking to delve into Epicureanism today as a lived philosophy is Dr. Emil Austin's *Living for Pleasure*. Hands down. That's my current top of the list for anyone curious about "What's this whole Epicurean thing about?" It was a pleasure getting to talk with her on the podcast.

Thanks for the links to your papers. I found them interesting. I certainly agree that the ancient Epicureans had sex, and I liked your mentions of Epicureans' marriage and long-term relationships.

One related thing that hit me very recently is that, upon [reading Gedney's recent Substack post](#), he pointed out that Epicurus in his Will makes arrangements for the son and daughter of Metrodorus which means/implies that Epicurus was the one who had responsibility for the children so to be the one able to make this request. (The question remains: What happened to their mother? But a woman wouldn't have had "custody" in ancient Greece anyway) I don't mean to imply (necessarily) that Epicurus was playing tag with the kids when they were younger, but he seems to have had a custodial/*in loco parentis* relationship to these children. If he was helping to raise the children, it doesn't seem he'd disapprove of a relationship by which children come into the world.

Quote from Max DuBoff

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 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.)

LOL I like your "perhaps" there...bring on the controversy as far as I'm concerned. Discussion engenders understanding.

[Quote from Max DuBoff](#)

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).

To make sure I'm following your train and we're talking about the same things:

- tranquility = ataraxia?
- blessedness = makarios?
- happiness = eudaimonia? (I personally like "well-being" rather than happiness)

Would you say those line up generally (FULLY realizing there's never a one-to-one)?

Let's see how far apart we actually are. I would agree that "tranquility" (to stick to English for a moment) is the foundation upon which a life of *blessedness* or *happiness* is built. I understand that ataraxia refers specifically (for Epicurus) to the absence (a-) of "disturbance" (tarakhe) in the mind caused by fear of the gods, anxiety about death, worry about having "enough" and what other people think, etc. To try to get a handle on this, [I tried to go through and find all the occurrences of the word and variants in the ancient texts a while ago](#). I was surprised at how many times it comes up in the Letter to Herodotus, like "mental tranquillity means being released from all these troubles and cherishing a continual remembrance of the highest and most important truths." (10.82) So, if we free ourselves from those sources of pain, our minds/souls/heart/psykhe become a solid foundation upon which to build our well-being/blessedness. The seas calm, and we can sail our boat with confidence that we can weather any storm because we KNOW gut-level what really matters, how much we really need if worse comes to worst, and can effortlessly enjoy pleasures without frantically grasping for them, fighting for prestige, glamor, riches, fame, constant luxuries.

It's not that other pleasures "improve" tranquility (ataraxia), it's that tranquility is the foundation by which other pleasures can be experienced as good unadulterated by fear, anxiety, disturbance.

Letter to Menoecus 128 is very important. Completely agree. Here's my translation so readers know to what we're referring:

Quote from Letter to Menoikeus, Don (trans.)

The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection *for the health of the body* and for *the tranquility of the mind*, (that is for our physical and our mental existence), since this is the goal of a blessed life. For the sake of this (i.e., the health of the body and for the tranquility of the mind), we do everything in order to neither be in bodily or mental pain nor to be in fear or dread; and so, when once this has come into being around us, it sets free all of the calamity, distress, and suffering of the mind, seeing that the living being has no need to go in search of something that is lacking for the good of our mental and physical existence. For it is then that we need pleasure, if we were to be in pain from the pleasure not being present; but if we were to not be in pain, we no longer desire or beg for pleasure. And this is why we say *pleasure is the foundation (arkhe) and fulfillment (telos) of the blessed life*.

So, I read the "goal (telos) of a blessed life" is BOTH the health of the body and the tranquility of the mind (ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν <τῆς ψυχῆς> ἀταραξίαν). Plus pleasure is the foundation and fulfillment again because there are only two feelings, and we eliminate those sources of pain that we are able to. We seek for pleasure as the foundation (the cradle analogy) and, when we eliminate pains, pleasure fills our blessed life to the brim.

I will add that Diogenes Laertius says that the Epicureans believed there were "Two sorts of happiness (eudaimonia) can be conceived, the one the highest possible, such as the gods enjoy, which cannot be augmented, the other admitting addition and subtraction of pleasures." To me, this implies that the "highest well-being/happiness" is only enjoyed by the gods. We mortals, while being able to approximate the blessed life of the gods will always have a well-being that can be augmented by addition and subtraction of pleasures.

[Quote from Max DuBoff](#)

it couldn't be the limit of the magnitude of pleasure (PD 3).

PD3 doesn't say *The limit of "tranquility" is the removal of all pains*. It says the limit of pleasure is the removal all pain. I won't belabor this, but if there are only two feelings - pleasure and pain - if all of one is removed, you're left with the other.

I don't believe you can read the PDs in isolation. The original text didn't have versification, so I encourage people to read "units" so to speak. I believe [PD20](#) needs to be read in the context of [PD19](#), 20, 21, and 22. "Finite time and infinite time contain the same amount of pleasure (τὴν ἥδονην)... The flesh assumes that the limits of pleasure (ἥδονῆς) are infinite, and that infinite joy can be produced only through infinite time...You must reflect on the fundamental goal and everything that is clear, to which opinions are referred; if you do not, all will be full of trouble and confusion." To me, this again is hammering home the two feelings - pleasure and pain. Pleasure is not infinite because its limit is the removal of all pain. Again, one is banished, the other one fills that void. There's no vacuum in the feelings. We can feel pleasure (positive

affect) or pain (negative affect) when we're alive. There is no neutral state per Epicurus and it seems modern neuropsychology.

Okay, I've rambled on long enough for now. Look forward to discussion from all.