

Welcome Max Duboff

Post by “Max DuBoff” of July 13, 2026 at 11:56 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

What is accurate is a claim about frequency and rank, not absence. Pleasure is named as the criterion of choice and avoidance in over a dozen doctrines (PD 3, 5, 8-10, 18-21, 25-26, 29-30, 40). Undisturbedness in this technical sense surfaces explicitly only once, in PD 17. And nowhere — including PD 17 — is it treated as a good in its own right or ranked above pleasure. In PD 17 it describes a *consequence* of justice, and justice is itself instrumental to living pleasantly (PD 5). Tranquility is never the measuring stick; pleasure remains that throughout. ...

Where later interpreters and many modern summaries treat ataraxia as Epicurus's stated goal, the Doctrines give that reading a real but narrow foothold — PD 17 — rather than the broad support it's often assumed to have. The dominant, explicit standard throughout the [Principal Doctrines](#) is pleasure. Tranquility appears, but only once, only in service of that standard, and never above it.

This generally seems right, but what it misses is that the absence of pain *is* a pleasure according to Epicurus. So it's pleasure vs. ataraxia for Epicurus; it's a question of how ataraxia fits into the landscape of pleasures. We need to ask and answer that question in order to figure out what to actually pursue, among the many pleasures that call out to us. I never wanted to deny that, for Epicurus, pleasure is the goal. What I do claim is that, for Epicurus, only some pleasures (katastematic ones) determine whether a life is blessed--and that's because the absence of pain is the only pleasure that can be complete.

Now, regarding your point about Plato and Seneca, what you quoted doesn't appear to be an argument that the best good has to be complete/perfect, but certainly Seneca thinks that and Plato (elsewhere) probably thinks that. Aristotle is a clear source for this view as well (one a swallow doesn't make a spring, in Nicomachean Ethics 1). So there were lots of folks who thought it. But hedonism doesn't require this view; the Cyrenaics adopted hedonism and rejected the claim that a good life is a complete/perfect one. See Diogenes Laertius 2.87 and 2.91 for the mainstream Cyrenaic position (trans. White):

"They also maintain that the end differs from happiness: the end is a particular pleasure, and happiness is the aggregate consisting of particular pleasures, which include both past pleasures and ones to come."

"They hold that a wise man's life is not entirely pleasant, nor a foolish man's entirely painful, only mostly so. It is enough if someone stays focused on the pleasures he encounters one by

one."

By the way, Sextus Empiricus is clear that Pyrrhonist ataraxia isn't the complete lack of pain (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.29-30).

To be clear, though, I think Epicurus absolutely endorsed the claim that a good (i.e., blessed) life is a perfect/complete one. But that was a choice. And it's a choice that fits uncomfortably with hedonism. Personally, I'm very convinced that Epicurus was right about hedonism and right that the absence of pain is a pleasure. I'm less convinced he was right that a blessed life is a perfect/complete life.