

# Epicurus' teaching on marriage

Post by "Cassius" of August 26, 2019 at 4:56 PM

Dubitor I have one more recommendation on this issue. Probably the best academic presentation of the views I am advocating is contained in Gosling & Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure." Here are two clips that summarize their view:

19.0.4. The kind of view we wish to oppose holds that it was an important feature of Epicureanism to insist on dividing pleasures into two sorts, sensory ones on the one hand, and katastematic ones, of which lack of disturbance of mind (*ataraxia*) and lack of pain (*aponia*) are the important examples, on the other. The distinction was important to Epicurus because it was the latter which he wished to put forward as the good in life, and he needed the contrast in order to defend himself against the charge that he was advocating a life of debauchery. He can be seen doing this in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (DL X.131-2) where he says that when we call pleasure the goal we do not mean the pleasures of profligates, but to be without pain of body or distress of mind. The pleasures of profligates are obviously the sensory pleasures, and Epicurus is making it clear that he is putting forward something else as our goal. There are four objections which such views have to meet (see 19.0.6-9).

graph, and follow

And here is their positive statement of the correct construction of what Epicurus taught:

*aponia* and *ataraxia* whereby *aponia* is a condition of having sensory pleasures but with no accompanying pain, and *ataraxia* is a state of confidence that one may acquire such sensory pleasures with complete absence of pain. This confidence is itself a positive state. However unadulterated by pain one's sensory pleasures may be, one's pleasure is all too likely to be spoiled by various misapprehensions. These will be false beliefs about death, about the gods, about fancy diet, about the limits of bodily pleasure, about the desirability of long life and so on. These erroneous beliefs disturb the mind (cf. *PD* 10-12, 18-22) and their removal is required for *ataraxia* (cf. passages just referred to and also *DL* X.81-2, 124-6, 130-2). But for *ataraxia* more than the absence of false beliefs is needed: they have to be replaced by true ones. It is these that give confident expectation of a pleasant life, and so constitute the removal of anxiety. In short, those ancient critics who complained that Epicurus laid great emphasis on bodily pleasures would on this view be right: what is important is to get a life of sensory pleasure un-tainted by pain; *ataraxia* is itself geared to *aponia*, and joy of mind generally is a matter of memory and expectation of unadulterated pleasure, based on true belief. The objection to the pleasures of profligates (*DL* X.131-2) and perhaps the only objection Epicurus has (cf. *PD* 10), is that they fail to remove anxiety. The point with profligates is, presumably, that they erroneously believe fine food to be necessary, fail to see when desire is satisfied, and so pursue their objectives to the point of consequent distress, and so foolishly fear, as threats to their good, things which should not be feared.

The [full chapter can be read here](#).