

Ataraxia: Tranquility at the End

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The typical modern call to passivism:

Ataraxia: Tranquility at the End

Paul M. Maitland

In their investigation of "eudaimonia" (happiness, human flourishing) Hellenistic philosophers (i.e., members of the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Skeptic schools) made frequent use of terms that were relatively new in the philosophical lexicon: among others, *ataraxia* (freedom from disturbance), *hēterotēleia* (serenity), *concordia* and *serenitas* (Seneca and Cicero's Latin translation of *eudaimonia*), *tranquillitas* (tranquility), *ataraxia* (quietness), *adiaphora* (indifference), and *apatheia* (the condition of being unmoved).¹ Even though most of them did not simply identify eudaimonia with ataraxia, it still remains that the notion of happiness they proposed took on a new significance because of this emphasis on ataraxia and related notions. Ataraxia is not simply a particular development in the history of ancient philosophy; the issue runs much deeper. It entails a transformation of the very meaning of philosophy. When eudaimonia is determined in terms of ataraxia the very purpose and meaning of philosophy also changes. To be a philosopher is first and foremost a matter of comparing fears and desires and the extent one should devote upon a philosophical school depends primarily on its ability to lead us to such an end. In other words, the emergence of ataraxia at the core of ethical discourse is deeply rooted in a renewed understanding of philosophy itself.

What the ancient philosophers had in mind with the term eudaimonia is quite different from the modern view of happiness as "enjoyment" or "delight." Considered strictly as a philosophical term, eudaimonia indicates the final end, the summum bonum of human life (i.e., as Aristotle observed, "every kind of knowing and every choice reach toward some good" [EN, 1095a13]). Thus eudaimonia points toward the ultimate goal, the final reason why people do what they do. Eudaimonia designates what humans really