

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 22, 2020 at 7:15 PM

ADMIN EDIT: Gosling & Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure" is a very important work, but it is difficult to find in a library. Look around for it and message us if you can't find it.

"The Greeks on Pleasure" is a detailed exposition of the development of Greek philosophic views on pleasure. The entire book is valuable, but the chapters on Epicurus are particularly good, and they provide an exhaustive discussion of the textual reasons why the conventional modern view that Epicurus focused on "absence of pain" as the goal of life is incorrect. These chapters were the inspiration for [Boris Nikolsky's "Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) which further extends the argument by showing that the "katastematic - kinetic" distinction which is so emphasized by modern commentators was probably **not** of significance to Epicurus and the original Epicurean leaders and was probably **not** an Epicurean teaching at all. Additional support for that argument can be found in [Wenham - On Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure in Epicurus](#).

The remainder of this thread is a merge of three separate threads originally started by Godfrey in February of 2020.

This book is pretty academic. As I am extremely non-academic, this post consists only of quotes and/or paraphrases of portions of the book. These are merely notes of things that I found interesting and not at all an outline or summary of the book.

In the book, the authors number practically every paragraph (i.e. 1.0.1), and I have included these numbers for reference as to where my notes came from more specifically. This posting is mainly intended for reference (not to discourage discussion, however, as anyone feels the desire) future part(s) will deal with Epicurus and should be more interesting for discussion.

Chapter 1: The Background

Two approaches, didactic and physiological

1.1 **Didactic approach:** manly, effortful virtue/excellence as opposed to effeminate easy pleasures

1.1.3 Demetrius of Phaleron: pleasure is transitory as opposed to virtue

1.1.5 Solon: avoid pleasures which bring distress

1.1.5 Prodicus's story of Heracles: 1) the conventionally virtuous life is pleasanter than the life of luxury and 2) the best way to show that the virtuous life to be desirable is to show that it is pleasanter.

1.1.6 What is valuable is not short term pleasures but the long term pleasantness of one's life.

1.1.7 By the early 4th century BCE, didactic thinking has some elements of hedonism although these were subservient to virtue ethics.

1.2 Physiological approach

1.2.1 Empedocles (494-c434 BCE), Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia, as described by Theophrastus, consider pleasure and pain as kinds of perception.

1.2.6 Empedocles, pleasure results from filling a deficiency. (Note to [Cassius](#) , [Martin](#) and [Charles](#) : in the 6/20 Skype call I confused Eudoxus with Empedocles... did I mention that I'm not an academic?)

1.2.6 Theophrastus: "Empedocles says that desires arise in living things from their deficiencies in the elements which make each other complete, and pleasures from what is appropriate, according to the mixtures of things which are like and of like natures, and pains and sufferings from what is inappropriate." In other words desires and pleasure and pain relate to keeping the four elements in proper balance.

1.2.6 The urge toward pleasure is the natural instinct of the organism to seek its own best state.

Chapter 2: Evaluative Theories

2.1.3 Democritus had an ethical theory and pleasure was a central feature of it.

2.1.4 Democritus's ethics had a test of conduct. That test was based on the ultimate aim of life, and whether an action aided or hindered achieving that aim. The ultimate aim was a state of well-being. His first innovation was that well-being is a state of mind and independent of externals or possessions. He called this *euthumia* (gladness, joy, having one's emotional and appetitive self, "*thumos*," in a good state), not *eudaimonia*. Secondly, he gave *euthumia* a specific definition: "...the end is *euthumia*, which is not the same as pleasure... but is that state in which the soul remains in calm and stability, not shaken by any fear or superstition or any other emotion." So he saw the aim of life as a state of tranquility rather than a life of pleasure as commonly recognized.

2.1.4 The term *ataraxia* (freedom from disturbance) was not in common use before Epicurus. It was the standard Epicurean term for the ideal state of the soul.

2.1.4 Democritus saw the aim of life as tranquility, not what is generally recognized as a life of pleasure. But he may have considered a life of tranquility as the pleasantest life.

2.1.5 *Euthumia* consists in the distinction and discrimination of pleasures, the finest and most beneficial thing for men per Democritus.

2.1.5 Pleasure isn't considered the pleasure of the moment but the long term pleasure of one's life.

2.1.8 Per Democritus, all men have the same good, *euthumia*, and a life of moderation was required to achieve it.

2.3.1 Aristippus is considered the champion of the sybaritic life (sensuous, self-indulgent) and the founder of the Cyrenaic school.

2.3.3 Cyrenaics were radical hedonists, taking the pleasure of the moment to be more important than the pleasantest life. Bodily pleasures were most important, but no pleasure was pleasanter than any other. All living things pursue pleasure and shun pain. All we have available to us is the present moment, which is why the pleasure of the moment is the most important.

2.3.4 Notes sybaritic hedonism v rational long term hedonism.

(The authors now embark on almost 300 pages devoted to Plato and Aristotle. For me, this wasn't very fruitful reading so I skimmed and skipped over most of it. Apologies to anyone interested in these two; perhaps somebody else could post on these chapters. Following are my sparse notes from that portion.)

Chapter 3: Protagorus

3.1.1 Pleasure is confined to the concluding pages of Protagorus.

3.2.12 Socrates probable view is that the good equals long term pleasantness. This comprises three theses: 1) Long term pleasantness is the only thing that everyone ultimately aims at, 2) long term pleasantness is the only thing ultimately worth having, and 3) what makes the things we call "goods" worth having is their contribution to a life in which pleasure predominates over distress.

Chapter 4: Gorgias

4.1.1 Callicles in the Gorgias would rather have a life of continual recurrence of unsatisfied desire, as this would allow him repeated opportunities for replenishment, i.e. pleasure.

Chapter 5: Phaedo

5.1.1 In the Phaedo, Plato separates the body and the soul and begins to develop the purpose of life as development of the immortal soul. In this conception the pleasures of the body are a nasty diversion from the work of the soul.

Chapter 6: Republic

6.8.8 Plato in the Republic is unaware of the distinction between the process of replenishment and the end state of repletion when considering pleasure to be the fulfillment of a lack. Pleasure as produced by becoming v being.

Chapter 8: Between *Republic* and *Philebus*

8.3.1 Eudoxus of Cnidus (via Aristotle): pleasure is the good because:

- all animals, including men, pursue it, and what all pursue is the good
- all animals and men avoid pain as an evil, and what is opposite of an evil, pleasure, must be good
- pleasure is never for the sake of something else: no one ever asks "why enjoy yourself?"
- if pleasure is added to anything it makes it better.

(Note to [Cassius](#) , [Martin](#) and [Charles](#) : here's Eudoxus.)

Chapter 11: Aristotle: the Contrast of Treatments

11.3.10 Aristotle is saying that to enjoy something is to bring a *telos* to the doing: to do it to the full.

Chapter 13: Pleasure: Formal or Final Cause

13.2.4 *Telos* is not a decisively purpose word like goal, but it equally means completion or perfection. Aristotle often uses it as actualization of natural potential.

(From here I'll skip to chapter 18, which begins the treatment of Epicurus. I'll start a new thread for that.)