

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Godfrey" of June 25, 2020 at 5:59 PM

Quote

18.3.15 A wise man needs to know certain basic facts about man and nature, convince himself of them and acquire certain habits of life. These will ensure that pleasure predominates. No daily hedonic calculus is necessary; the calculation is all at the stage of working out the facts, the effects of belief in them, and the proper regimen. From time to time one will have to review one's knowledge and confirm one's attitudes and practices. Once one is convinced of the truth of Epicurus' doctrines and has incorporated his teachings into one's life, one ceases to worry and lives a life as near to ataraxia and aponia as is possible for one. To achieve the best life possible, conviction and good habits are enough. One's wisdom shows in the acquisition and development of those characteristics that will keep his life as pleasant as it can be, and that being so he will not be deluded into thinking that it will improve if only it lasts a little longer.

18.3.17 Living a life free of disturbance is not just a matter of staying alive and not being disturbed, as with a person under heavy sedation, but living the sort of life specific to the being in question. This is vaguely Aristotelean: if one is living according to one's nature then one is enjoying one's life, and failure of enjoyment is a function of disrupted nature. Epicurus is less interested in individual activities and their enjoyment, and more in a condition of the individual which ensures him balance independently of external circumstance.

18.3.19 Ataraxia consists in a condition of correct belief, and aponia in a condition free of bodily lack. Epicurean wisdom, *phronesis*, is more like Aristotelean practical wisdom than Plato's wisdom. The distinction between wisdom and ataraxia is therefore verbal rather than real. Since absence of wisdom is equivalent to the absence of ataraxia and therefore of mental pleasure, and its presence to the presence of mental pleasure, using it or mental pleasure as a criterion of worth amount to the same thing.

This quote is, to me, particularly compelling and also disturbing. It seems to be something of a summation of Epicurean pleasure from G&T's point of view.

The idea that the understanding and acceptance of the philosophy, combined with good habits (presumably these include the pursuit of pleasure!) seems to me to be simply how one lives according to any chosen philosophy. I like that they seem to be attempting to come to a resolution of the "absence of pain" argument which doesn't involve living in a bubble. However the idea that *ataraxia* is basically the same thing as *phronesis* seems to open the door for all sorts of problems, primarily the argument that one should pursue practical wisdom rather than

pleasure. However PD 5 is saying largely the same thing to my mind. So is my concern in this regard just a matter of semantics, of trying to define an undefinable abstract good? I fear that in defining pleasure they have removed pleasure from the equation.