

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Don" of June 26, 2020 at 8:21 AM

This may be off thread a little and a little later to the game, but here goes. And I after with [Cassius](#) 's last post. Academic philosophers probably need to tow the party line to an extent if they want to publish and present.

On 18.3.19, it seems off to me as well, and I mostly agree with [Cassius](#) on his thoughts on ataraxia in that section there. For me, ataraxia and aponia have been simply characteristics of the most pleasant life. The fact that they are both negative (a- "not, no" as in apolitical, atheist, etc.) has struck me as odd; but, as descriptors of pleasure, I think I can see where Epicurus is coming from. Pleasure can be euphoric, washing over you so thoroughly that you get that "wrapped in a warm blanket" feeling, not disturbed, not feeling any pain. Actually, the "-ponia" is cognate with "ponos" which is defined as:

- work, especially hard work; toil
- bodily exertion, exercise
- work, task, business
- the consequence of toil, distress, trouble, suffering

So, the connotation of "aponia" goes beyond what we think of as feeling pain in your body. The non-philosophical definition of "aponia" is actually "laziness, non-exertion."

I don't want to go down a tranquilist rabbit hole, but there's an element of tranquility in there.

I think both academic and popular writers get hung up on Ataraxia and Aponia in Fragment 2 being called katastematic pleasures, but if you look at the whole text below, why aren't euphrosunē and khara obsessed over as well. Ataraxia is used throughout Epicurus's writing simply referring to "peace of mind" but it's hidden by various translations of the Greek.

Here are some examples I found in a quick search. I think it helps to see Ataraxia used in a wider context. My notes are in brackets.

Fragment 519: The greatest fruit of justice is serenity [ataraxia]. δικαιοσύνης καρπὸς μέγιστος ἀταραξία.

[You have peace of mind if you treat people justly.]

Fragment 2: Lack of mental disturbance [ataraxia] and lack of bodily pain [aponia] are static pleasures, whereas revelry [khara] and rejoicing [euphrosunē] are active pleasures involving movement. ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀταραξία καὶ <ἡ> ἀπονία καταστηματικά ἐῖσις ἡδοναί. ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ

εὐφροσύνη κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργεῖα βλέπονται.

[It seems to me that here it's just saying that lack of pain and mental distress don't involve moving around or doing something but they're still pleasurable, revelry and rejoicing by definition seem to involve bodily movement (dancing, singing, merry-making if you will). I realize tons of academic ink have been spilled on this, so I'm sure I haven't settled anything here! Just my take. And I also think this contrasts with the Cyrenaics, to bring it back, who felt all pleasure started in the body not in the mind. Epicurus may be emphasizing both the mind (no disturbance in the mind) and the body (no disturbance in the body) since the Cyrenaics seem to have only recognized pleasure as originating in the body.]

Letter to Menoikos:

The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject [uses same Greek terms for "choice and avoidance"] in terms of the health of the body and the serenity [ataraxia] of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life.

τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἴρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἔστι τέλος.

[Here we see "health of the body" (hygieian) and not "aponia" paired with ataraxia. So it's not like the word ataraxia is always paired with the word aponia. And these two are said here to explicitly be the goal/telos of a completely happy life, literally a blessed life using the same word (makarios) to describe the gods in PD 1. I don't think that takes anything away from pleasure. A healthy body and a peaceful mind are pleasurable. But Epicurus's explicit use of telos here is interesting. I think he's just using health (of the body) and ataraxia as synonyms for the most pleasant life, which *is* the goal/telos.]

Letter to Pythocles:

"In the first place, remember that, like everything else, knowledge of celestial phenomena, whether taken along with other things or in isolation, has no other end in view than peace of mind [ataraxia] and firm conviction."

Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν μὴ ἄλλο τι τέλος ἐκ τῆς περὶ μετεώρων γνώσεως εἶτε κατὰ συναφὴν λεγομένων εἶτε αὐτοτελῶς νομίζειν εἶναι ἢπερ ἀταραξίαν καὶ πίστιν βέβαιον, καθάπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν λοιπῶν.

[Here Epicurus calls ataraxia the telos/goal of knowledge. The goal of this knowledge is to have peace of mind or ataraxia. And he emphasizes this in the next excerpt, too.]

Letter to Pythocles:

([96] For in all the celestial phenomena such a line of research is not to be abandoned;) for, if you fight against clear evidence, you never can enjoy genuine peace of mind [ataraxia].

ἦν γὰρ τις ἢ μαχόμενος τοῖς ἐναργήμασιν, οὐδέποτε δυνήσεται ἀταραξίας γνησίου μεταλαβεῖν.