

# Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

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This is a continuation of notes on Gosling and Taylor's The Greeks on Pleasure, begun here: [Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure \(Notes up to but not including Epicurus\)](#) and continued here: [Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure \(Notes on Epicurus\)](#)

For the most part these are quotes and/or paraphrases from the book; my comments are italicized and in parentheses. Text in bold is my emphasis. The authors of the book are not Epicureans, theirs is an academic take on Epicurean pleasure, worthy of discussion. There is much more to their discussion of Epicurus than I've been able to include here, but I think I've covered their main points.

## Chapter 19: Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures

*(Note: this entire chapter is posted at [Gosling & Taylor, On Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasure](#). What follows here is my personal notes; if you're interested in their complete argument I'd advise reading the full chapter. I've kept my notes pretty brief)*

19.2.2 What perception reveals to us directly is the goodness of pleasure and the badness of pain and thereby that the only unqualified good is pleasure without pain. Since any painless perception is pleasant, perception reveals the goodness, though not the achievability, of *aponia*. **The value of *ataraxia* is parasitic upon that of *aponia*, since the only *ataraxia* worth having is that which comes from pleasant memories and confident expectations of sensory pleasures of a painless kind. Thus the body's pleasures have pride of place.** *(Does this bolded statement conflict with, or elaborate on, their statement in 18.3.15: "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.")*

19.2.3 Epicurus is inclined to use *ataraxia* and *aponia* as conditions of life, not particular pleasures.

19.2.4 Since *aponia* is just a condition of painless perception it does not mean that Epicurus thought of a non-perceiving state as pleasurable.

19.3.2 ***Katastematic* pleasures refer to "the well-established *katastema* (condition) of the flesh. Not to replenishment, movement, or *katastasis eis phusin* (restoration to the natural state). The latter was an argument against pleasure, on the basis that what was being returned to was the good, not pleasure. When the organism is operating properly it will be in a state of pleasure, and pain is a matter of unnatural operation.**

19.3.3 Therefore *kinetic* pleasures are not a different kind than *katastematic* ones: they too are sensory and a matter of some part of the organism operating properly. Due to this most of Cicero can be discounted in this regard.

**19.4.27 *Ataraxia* is achieved by the removal of superstitious fear and false beliefs, the constant memory of the truth, and attention to present experience and perception. Now the mind is free of disturbance and so memory and expectation operate without anxiety. Similarly when physical pain is removed the body operates without pain and that will mean that always some pleasurable and painless perception is occurring, a condition of good cheer.**

19.4.30 When the organism is functioning harmoniously it is always having some form of perception; since the operation is harmonious the perception is pleasant and without pain; that is just what *aponia* is. *Ataraxia* is the condition when, because of correct views, our expectations are undisturbed by fear, our desires do not pursue empty objectives and our memories are pleasant: this leaves us to enjoy our pleasures unanxiously.

## **Chapter 20: Pleasure as a Criterion of Truth in Epicurus**

20.3.1 The doctrine that the highest pleasure is freedom from pain and distress = the highest pleasure is freedom from consciousness of improper functioning.

**20.3.3 The perception of an oar in the water being bent is true, but determining if it represents reality requires comparison with other perceptions. Similarly with pleasure: the feeling of pleasure regarding a given stimulus is true in that it reveals the proper functioning of the relevant part of the organism. The belief that it is choiceworthy, however, requires confirmation by other appearances.**

**20.3.4 Pleasure is an unimpeded actualization of the natural state. The psycho-physical organism has a built-in urge toward its proper functioning, and consequently sees the pursuit of pleasure, understood as consciousness of proper functioning, as the way of life dictated by man's nature and hence as the appropriate way of life for a man.**

20.3.4 In order to avoid error one must not affirm that things are precisely as they appear, but one must distinguish those judgments which are confirmed by further appearances and those which are not, taking the former as true and the latter as false. One's judgement must be determined, not by the immediate appearance (as of pleasure or pain), but by the goal which nature sets: the life of unhindered, that is painless, physical and mental functioning.

20.4.1 As thus interpreted, the theory is open to a basic objection. We have argued that the physical reality which is truly represented by the feeling of pleasure is the proper functioning of that part of the organism where the pleasure is felt. But if that pleasure leads, not to the unhindered functioning of the whole organism, but to subsequent pains, i.e. malfunctions, then surely the original function which was felt as pleasure could not have been *proper* functioning, since the proper functioning of any part must be what contributes to the smooth functioning of

the whole. This is a difficulty for the theory, not the interpretation, and it applies for any theory (not only Epicurean) that maintains that pleasure is a restoration of the natural state and that certain pleasures result, not in the restoration of the natural state but in unnatural states accompanied by distress. *(Does 20.3.3 above overcome this objection? Isn't that how the theory describes the physical reality?)*

20.4.1 This objection can be met, given more precision in the formulation of the theory. Example: the proper functioning of the nutritive organs consist in the ingestion of food, in that this allows the organism as a whole to feel free from the distress of hunger. Therefore we are constituted to feel pleasure when we eat. If someone eats to excess, the defect does not lie with his nutritive organs, which are working properly and so produce pleasure, but in his lack of recognition of the limit to which that function should be exercised. Epicurus addresses this in PD 18-21.

20.4.2 What about empty desires, which don't contribute to any natural good? Practical wisdom encourages eliminating these, yet as long as pleasure is felt they are considered to be good. If these are not appropriate to the organism, but to a disordered nature, then that empties the notion of appropriateness is emptied of content. *(Again see 20.3.3 above.)*

20.5.2 The main objection to the account of pleasure, that it cannot deal successfully with unnecessary pleasures, is in fact an objection to the general theory of Epicurus. That theory is an impressively systematic attempt to revive the early physiological accounts of pleasure as a form of perception, and to apply it to the epistemological theory which fitted the general account of perception. In thus striving for generality it paid the usual price, failure to deal with recalcitrant counter instances. As always, the multi-colored butterfly of pleasure eludes the net of necessary and sufficient conditions. *(Once again see 20.3.3. Since I'm an amateur at this, can anybody explain this last sentence to me? What would be necessary, and what would be sufficient?)*

## **Chapter 21: The Stoics**

*(As I understand this chapter, their argument is that the Stoic theory of pleasure would be a part of the idea that any impression must be assented to. My thinking is that while this has some value for therapy for, say, addiction or anger management, this is not how pleasure functions. Pleasure and pain occur as perceptions, before the opportunity for assent. Choice and avoidance again are as described in 20.3.3.)*

21.7.1 A fully adequate theory of pleasure needs to combine the Stoic insights (regarding pleasure as a belief, an assent) with elements drawn from other theories, in particular something more like an Aristotelean/Epicurean theory of enjoyment. Gosling regards being pleased, rather than enjoyment, as the central concept in the elucidation of the complex phenomena of pleasure. The book ends with a footnote referencing another book by Gosling for his take on a complete theory of pleasure. *(A poor excuse for a cliffhanger if you ask me.)*

*(This concludes my decidedly non-scholarly notes on the book. It is an excellent though very academic book, but were it not for the fact that over half of the book is dedicated to Plato, I*

*would heartily recommend it. It was challenging but worth the effort that I put into it. A richer knowledge of ancient Greek philosophy than I possess, and perhaps more effort than I was able to put into it, would prove it to be richly rewarding.)*