

Post At Modern Epicurean Blog - "Epicurean Ethics Considered And Defended"

Post by "Don" of September 10, 2020 at 12:11 PM

Hello, [JCRAGO](#). Well, [Cassius](#) certainly has explained his position in detail. And I want to say I'm glad you decided to post to the forum to give us all the opportunity to explore differing interpretations of Epicurus's philosophy. I apologize for taking so long to post something here.

You said: **I am positively declaring that pleasure is the end of life and that the greatest pleasure is painlessness.**

I can't see any Epicurean arguing with your first clause there! 😊

As to the second clause, by painlessness, it appears you're referring to aponia (freedom from pain and exertion) paired with ataraxia (tranquility) as an example of a "static/stable pleasure" and contrasted with joy (khara) and merriment (euphrosyne) as "pleasures of movement." To me, Epicurus is not setting up a hierarchy here but merely describing different pleasures. This seems to be the only place he talks about aponia itself.

Elsewhere, Epicurus is quoted as saying he can't conceive of pleasure (the good) "without the joys of taste, of sex, of hearing, and without the pleasing motions caused by the sight of bodies and forms." (Fragment 67)

In light of that, I'm genuinely curious why you come to the conclusion that "the greatest pleasure is painlessness" or aponia? Why not ataraxia? Why not joy or merriment? Most people I've seen online gravitate to highlighting ataraxia, so your approach at least seems novel.

In your blog post, you mention "Sherman introduces a novel twofold distinction between kinetic pleasures: there is "specific" kinetic pleasure which makes us feel better by removing a specific pain and there is "non-specific" kinetic pleasure which makes us feel better by distracting us from a specific pain." I see no justification for this in the extant writings of Epicurus.

Removal of pain is discussed in Principal Doctrine 3, but that doesn't seem to me to support aponia as the greatest pleasure: "The limit of the magnitude of pleasure (is) the entirety of the removal of that which causes pain. Where that which gives pleasure exists, during the time it is present, there is neither pain nor that which causes pain in body or mind nor either of these together."

The first clause does say that the "limit of the magnitude of pleasure is the entirety of the removal of that which causes pain." It doesn't say the state of painlessness itself but the removal of that which causes pain. And then Epicurus states that pleasure is what removes pain. When pleasure is present, pain and that which causes it are not. So, pleasure - the

greatest good, the foundation and fulfillment of a blessed life - should be what we seek. Pleasure removes pain, so I don't think you can say painlessness (what you're calling "the greatest pleasure") removes pain. That seems a bit of a tautology.

I went looking for other translations that talked about "highest pleasure" and found the following:

DL X.130: "bread and water give the highest pleasure when someone in need partakes of them." Eating bread and drinking water are kinetic pleasures and merely indicative of the adage "Hunger is the best spice."

There's also Fragment 68 (quoted in Plutarch's "... Pleasant Life Impossible"): "To those who are able to reason it out, the highest and surest joy (khara, one of the kinetic pleasures) is found in the stable health of the body and a firm confidence in keeping it." That fragment seems to elevate one of the kinetic pleasures (khara) to the greatest pleasure and also defines the joy as "a well-balanced, stable condition of the body" not aponia.

I'm reluctant to use Cicero as a source (others on this forum will most likely disagree) unless he's maintaining that he's directly quoting Epicurus's writings. Cicero's commentary, even in the mouth of Torquatus, is most likely skewed to his own motives.

I'm not going to get into whether you're being positive or negative by focusing on painlessness. I simply don't think you can single out one pleasure as the greatest when, to my understanding, Epicurus didn't.