

Ataraxia: Tranquility at the End

Post by “Hiram” of September 14, 2019 at 4:23 PM

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Post by “Cassius” of September 14, 2019 at 5:38 PM

The typical modern call to passivism:

Ataraxia: Tranquility at the End

Paul Matis

In their investigation of “eudaimonia” (happiness, human flourishing) Hellenistic philosophers (i.e., members of the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Skeptic schools) made frequent use of terms that were relatively new in the philosophical lexicon; among others: ataraxia (freedom from disturbance), letargia (torpor), tranquillitas and otiositas (Seneca and Cicero’s Latin translation of *ataraxia*), *tranquillitas* (Stability), *ataraxia* (quietness), *adulphosia* (indifference), and *apatheia* (the condition of being unmoved).¹⁰⁶ Even though most of these did not simply identify eudaimonia with ataraxia, it still remains that the notion of happiness they proposed took on a new significance because of this emphasis on ataraxia and related notions. At stake is not simply a particular development in the history of ancient philosophy; the issue runs much deeper. It entails a transformation of the very meaning of philosophy. When eudaimonia is determined in terms of ataraxia the very purpose and meaning of philosophy also changes. To be a philosopher is first and foremost a matter of comparing fears and desires and the extent one should bestow upon a philosophical school depends primarily on its ability to lead us to such an end. In other words, the emergence of ataraxia at the core of ethical discourse is deeply rooted in a renewed understanding of philosophy itself.

What the ancient philosophers had in mind with the term eudaimonia is quite different from the modern view of happiness as “enjoyment” or “delight.” Considered strictly as a philosophical term, eudaimonia indicates the final end, the summum bonum of human life for, as Aristotle observed, “every kind of knowing and every choice reach toward some good” (EN, 1095a13). Thus eudaimonia points toward the ultimate goal, the final reason why people do what they do. Eudaimonia designates what humans really

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All moving toward the same negative goal, as if Epicurus were an angst-ridden snowflake whose only concern was to quell his own fears:

requirements for happiness be reevaluated. For the Epicureans and the Skeptics *eudaimonia* calls for the attainment of *ataraxia*. The Stoics held a rather similar view, although they prefer the term *apatheia*.⁶⁸ What is striking in all these new terms (although not perceptible in most translations) is that the determination of this requirement is, in its linguistic form, mostly negative (*a-taraxia*, *a-patheia*, *a-diaphora*). Happiness is not the achievement or the attainment of a human potential; rather, it is a release from worry, anxiety, and disturbance; a liberation that results from the therapeutic examination of our beliefs.⁶⁹ This new focus reveals that the inner conflicts of the soul have become the chief concern since they are now identified as the main obstacle to happiness. Thus, *ataraxia* seems to name an absence, a lack. Many, following Hegel's pronouncement, have diagnosed this aim of life as a sheer renunciation of the world and a withdrawal into self-satisfaction.⁷⁰ This perception needs to be revised. *Ataraxia*, as it is articulated by the Hellenistic philosophers, calls for transcending desire, passion or commitments. Although it is linguistically expressed in a negative form, *ataraxia* indicates a process of overcoming that remains within immanence; it does not seek human perfection in a transcendent realm. To

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If I read this article correctly (admittedly I am skimming, because I refuse to devote more time to this) it ends with an endorsement of SKEPITISM. Wow. So the article appears to be another brick in the academic wall of shutting off all hope of pleasurable living by redefining pleasure as nothingness.

But why would a Skeptic life, a life in which one constantly suspends judgment, be a happy one? Acknowledging our inability to reach any certainty about the ultimate nature of reality, the nature of the soul or the existence of the gods could be a cause of anxiety and