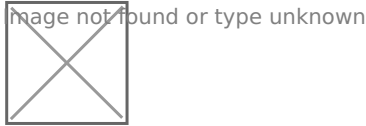


# Another Exchange on Ataraxia

Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2017 at 7:27 AM

Here's one of the clearest doctrines that upends the perspective that there is any standard higher than pleasure and pain - [PD10](#) "If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky and death and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full with pleasures from every source and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life."

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Now certainly "pleasure" and "pain" are numberless in type, and MENTAL pleasure can be counted as more intense than physical pleasure: Torquatus, from On Ends:

"(3) Regardless of this, we maintain that this does not preclude mental pleasures and pains from being much more intense than those of the body; since the body can feel only what is present to it at the moment, whereas the mind is also cognizant of the past and of the future. For, even granting that pain of body is equally painful, yet our sensation of pain can be enormously increased by the belief that some evil of unlimited magnitude and duration threatens to befall us hereafter. And the same consideration may be transferred to pleasure -- a pleasure is greater if not accompanied by any apprehension of evil. It therefore clearly appears that intense mental pleasure or distress contributes more to our happiness or misery than a bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration."

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[Cassius Amicus](#) But in the end the standard remains pleasure and pain as revealed to us through our natural faculties at particular times and places and circumstances, and not a "higher" preconceived single standard for all men and places and times, or an abstract ranking

of activities or ideas according to a religion or a logical construct.

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[Todd Gibson](#) Cassius, do you mean to include ataraxia as a "higher preconceived single standard"? It seems to me that ataraxia is best classified as a sensation, which can produce pleasure. But there are other pleasures that are decidedly not tranquil. To refer to ataraxia as the ultimate end and non-different from pleasure seems like a mistake. Thoughts?

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[Elli Pensa](#) Todd hi ! You wrote : <<But there are other pleasures that are decidedly not tranquil".

IMO the only thing that brings non tranquil in our mind and soul is PAIN. What are those pleasures that are decidedly not tranquil ? Someone would say listening to music or reading a book or staring the sky. Ok then why the body (mind and soul) still are in motion and in function ? E.g when you reading a book won't you feel pleasure ? Why we have to be under the regime of dialectic method to place in categories the pleasure ? All pleasures are good. That's all.

Besides, we can't see any decidedly tranquility in the Nature ~~all are in motion and the Earth~~

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travel around, or "orbit", the Sun at a velocity of 29.8 km/sec.

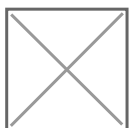
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[Elli Pensa](#) And to not be confused ... IMO among these two situations of a behavior there is

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Pleasure.

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[Cassius Amicus](#) Todd Gibson: Yes I agree with you. I consider "ataraxia" to be an adverb describing a way in which pleasures are experienced, meaning that the particular state of experiencing pleasure at a particular moment is "without disturbance" or "smoothly." I do not consider "ataraxia" to be a separate pleasure in and of itself, and I do not consider it to be a word that standing alone should be used to constitute the Epicurean guide or goal of life. Dead bodies are also in a state of steadiness (at least for a while) but that would not be considered ataraxia because there is no particular experience going on in a dead body.

Now I don't doubt that non-Epicurean philosophers may abstract out the term "ataraxia" and attempt to hypothesize that it as an "ideal state" that exists "in the air," like the Stoics would identify a state of "virtue" as their goal. And in fact I think that is the basic problem - people are looking through Stoic eyes and expect to see a "state of perfection" or "salvation" as the Epicurean goal, since that is the approach of Stoicism and religion. They also wish to identify some "higher" or "more worthy" pleasure since their predisposition is to think that they can rank states of pleasure according to preconceived notions of which are "best." But I think Epicurus would analogize the issue of "ataraxia in the abstract" to something like color. For Epicureans "yellow" does not exist either as an ideal form or "intrinsically." Yellow does not exist apart from things that are yellow. But yellow can be ranked in terms of "purity" of yellow, and lack of mixture with other colors, with our description of certain things as "pure yellow" means that it is not mixed with another color (among numberless colors). In the same way our description of a thing as pleasurable means that it is not painful (among the two choices only of pleasure and pain) and our description of a particular moment as being "pure pleasure" ("aponia") means only that it is not mixed with pain. Yellow does not tell us WHAT the thing is that is yellow, and "pure pleasure" does not tell us WHAT pleasures are being experienced.

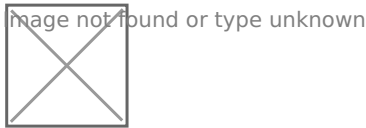
In the same way, the "smooth and tranquil experience" of pleasure does not exist apart from the experience of particular pleasures. The goal of pleasurable living is best experienced in a full and smooth and unbroken way, a descriptive analogy being as a jar or vessel filled with liquid (pleasure) neither jostled and spilling from the top (which would be the disturbance which we seek to avoid in the term "ataraxia") nor under-filled through asceticism or error or pain of any kind (underfilling means that pain is present since there are only two basic experiences, pleasure and pain, and the vessel analogy is the total of our individual capacity for experiences of all kind). (See opening of DRN Book VI for one place this analogy appears.)

So in the Epicurean framework I do not see "tranquility / ataraxia" as the same thing as a life of pleasure (which is the true goal of life). And that is why I do not believe Cicero was being redundant in stating these two separately in the final words of the cite below:

Cicero, In defense of Publius Sestius, 10.23: "He {Publius Clodius} praised those most who are said to be above all others the teachers and eulogists of pleasure {the Epicureans}. ... He added that these same men were quite right in saying that the wise do everything for their own interests; that no sane man should engage in public affairs; that nothing was preferable to a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures. "

So I believe that a correct formulation of the Epicurean goal would be "a life crammed full of pleasures experienced without disturbance."

I have collected the Latin for that cite, and other cites which lead to a similar conclusion on this point here: <http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...nXLizFft4dSkiVM>



### [The Full Cup / Fullness of Pleasure Model](#)

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[Cassius Amicus](#) I edited my post above a couple of times to make it as precise as I can. In the process I added in reference to "aponia." If we were looking for words to use to summarize the Epicurean goal of life, then "aponia" (Absence of pain) would be AT LEAST as important as "ataraxia." But we rarely hear "aponia" used - and

I suspect a large part of the reason is that Stoic ears love the sound of "tranquility," but they don't even like to hear "pleasure" referred to by implication (since thinking about absence of pain leads inexorably to thinking about pleasure).

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## **Post by "Titus" of October 28, 2023 at 1:29 PM**

I am looking for a thread in which to post my definition of ataraxia, which I came to think about through a discussion on katasematic pleasure:

Speaking from my own experience, I would define ataraxia as an attribute to one's character. It's achieved through a process of learning and studying the way things are. Unlike the Stoics, it's not about indifference or accepting one's fate, but empowerment through understanding how the world works and how I can coordinate within. This underpins self-esteem and gives a feeling of freedom and relaxation. Although it's a relatively stable state, it needs nourishment, as we're living in an ever changing universe.