

Why Tranquility Should Not Be the Main Goal for an Epicurean

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 26, 2021 at 5:04 PM

My newest blog entry, a "common sense" approach, that should align with the views of most on this forum:

Quote

In this blog I want to step outside the bounds of classical Epicurean scholarship and explore pleasure and tranquility using a simple “common sense” approach. Pleasure and tranquility need not be mutually exclusive. Not all stress should be avoided and modern Epicureans should move away from seeing tranquility as a main goal.

Epicureans want to live enjoyably and happily, yet modern life is far from tranquil and can create a lot of stress. As modern Epicureans we can see that some people greatly enjoy excitement, activity, and stimulation, and other people enjoy quietude, relaxation, and tranquility. Introverts are estimated to be 25% of the population, and tend to desire more tranquility than extroverts. So keeping in mind that there can be differences in temperament, it makes sense that what is considered pleasurable will also depend on temperament. It would be wrong to impose any one group’s preferences onto another group.

For the sensitive constitution of introverts, the right level of tranquility can be deeply pleasing. Believing that tranquility leads to an enjoyable and happy life, they will limit certain activities and there will be many activities they would never do. However, if they don’t live independently in a remote or rural location, they will need to decide how much stress they want to take on, and make choices. This will often be by trial and error.

With our common modes of transportation, our speed of life is much faster than in the time of antiquity. The structure of 21st century civilization is stressful, complex, and specialized. At the time of Epicurus, life would have very easily and naturally fallen into a simple and tranquil structure, but now it would take much more effort to recreate the tranquility of Ancient Greece. What was tranquil then, to us now appears as an ascetic lifestyle. Our modern brains are now wired for a certain level of stimulation, and the happiest life will need to find the most agreeable level of mental and sensory stimulation. Too much tranquility can become unhealthy and for some can lead to

feelings of emptiness, lethargy, and even lead to depression. So for these reasons it becomes questionable as to whether setting tranquility in life as a main goal will result in the most happy life. In addition, human beings are social animals and need to interact regularly with others to experience feelings of belonging and security. All social interaction contains within it a certain level of stress, but the goal of attaining pleasurable social interactions will help guide the modern Epicurean.

While the introverts might focus on modulating the level of stress in their lives, the other more extroverted folks will be busy taking on more challenges and living a much more active lifestyle. They will seek out adventure and novel sensory experiences. They will enjoy a lively environment that tickles the heart and mind with pleasure and joyful social interactions.

Regardless of introvert or extrovert tendencies, some stresses in life actually do lead to a kind of mental pleasure that cannot be produced by any other way. One example is participating in a gathering of people. With the right kind of people and in the right setting, the kind of joy that can well up within the heart cannot be found in solitude. And yet again this may best be enjoyed by those who have learned how to navigate a social environment. It is possible to learn and practice socializing in order to move from introvert to ambivert, and I would greatly encourage any introverted Epicureans to put effort into this, as the rewards are great.

Extroverted Epicureans already know and enjoy the pleasure of socializing, and they can help the introverts ease into the social fabric of a community, through thoughtful questions that pull introverts into conversation. Introverted Epicureans can also be of service to the community by bring the gifts they have learned through mastery of their sensitivities. They can help modulate the energy level if it gets too fast or loud, by requesting a resting break during community discussion. When attending a party and the dancing has ended, they can bring in more flowing soothing music conducive to good conversations.

The best kinds of gatherings would be between Epicureans who put forth the enjoyable meeting of the mind and the heart, as the agreed upon social goal. They would have no need for the social behaviors that cause stress, because they would set aside competition for attention, passive aggressiveness, pessimism, irritability, impatience, and harsh judgements. They would focus on sharing the joys of insight into the Epicurean philosophy and embody any kind of behavior that leads to pleasurable and agreeable friendship and conversation: smiles, encouragements, positivity, patience, clear and direct speaking, warm greetings and farewells of kisses and hugs. This kind of gathering would be stimulating for the mind and the senses, and yet enjoyable, and it very well could be considered both tranquil and stimulating at the same time.

Display More

[Why Tranquility Should Not Be the Main Goal for the Epicurean](#)

In this blog I want to step outside the bounds of classical Epicurean scholarship and explore pleasure and tranquility using a simple "commo...
epicureanphilosophyblog.blogspot.com

Post by "Cassius" of November 26, 2021 at 5:19 PM

I will probably have more thoughts after I think about this for a while, but for anyone who might question the implications of this sentence: "**Not all stress should be avoided and modern Epicureans should move away from seeing tranquility as a main goal.**" I have a comment:

I think that if Epicurus were here he would agree, and he would be the first to say "but modern Epicureans should never have identified tranquility as the goal of life. I was very clear - PLEASURE (not tranquility) is correct definition of the guide and goal of life." And he might point out that Venus was the goddess of pleasure, of love, and of many things similar to that, but that no one would ordinarily think to list "tranquility" as the first of her attributes.

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 26, 2021 at 5:44 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

he might point out that Venus was the goddess of pleasure, of love, and of many things similar to that

Okay, thank you, I will need to look into this more 🙄

Post by "Don" of November 26, 2021 at 8:19 PM

<https://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Aphrodite.html>

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 29, 2021 at 9:05 PM

This is an interesting write-up on tranquility and how it was differently understood within each of the major Classical schools of philosophy, including Epicureanism. (Author: Gisela Striker)

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27903171>

Post by “Don” of November 29, 2021 at 9:30 PM

I haven't read the whole paper yet, but this part sounds better than others I've seen (emphasis added):

*Epicurus argued that happiness will consist in both tranquillity and aponia. Thus **tranquillity, for Epicurus, is the state of mind of the happy person, a part of happiness, but not happiness itself.***

Post by “Cassius” of November 29, 2021 at 10:13 PM

Yes that makes a lot of sense to express it that way. Alternative ways to consider the relationships would include:

- 1 Tranquility is a part of pleasure, but not pleasure itself.
- 2 Tranquility is a pleasure, but is not pleasure itself.
- 3 Tranquility is an aspect of pleasure, but not pleasure itself.

Of those I would endorse option 2.

Probably the trickier issue is the contention that some seem to make:

- 1 Tranquility is not only "a" pleasure, but among all pleasures it is the "best."
- 2 Tranquility is not only "a" pleasure, but it is the goal and purpose of all other pleasures.

I would reject both of those contentions and would say that (1) Epicurus did not say either one, and (2) that these contentions are not "true" in the sense of being generally established for

everyone by nature. If someone in his or her individual circumstances decides to set "tranquility" as their ultimate goal in life I would not try too hard to argue them out of it, if they truly believe that to be warranted by their circumstances. But I would expect for most people in most circumstances "tranquility" would be an unnecessarily limited goal. In general if someone stated to me that their ultimate goal in life was "peace" or to escape pain I would start wondering what kind of doctor they might need. But in the end I think it's a choice each individual has to make at each moment of his or her life.

Post by “Cassius” of November 29, 2021 at 10:37 PM

On that last point, about the goal being "peace" I like to dramatize that issue with the closing scene of HG Wells' " Things to Come." The actor who plays the tall guy is the one I [mentioned in the podcast this week to Joshua](#). His name is Raymond Massey and he played John Brown in the movie we discussed. I will post that link in that thread. Massey really knew how to convey "intensity", and this clip sets up the question of choosing between types of pleasure which appear to be more vs less dangerous. In this clip, the two male characters have just launched their two children off to a journey to the moon from which they may never return, and one of the two men is not happy about it at all. The whole movie revolves around such questions but the final scenes brings it home.

"Which shall it be?" 😊

In both of these movies I think a reasonable person would ask at the end: Is Raymond Massey's character crazy? Or is he the sanest person you've ever seen?

PS - In "Santa Fe Trail" Massey is clearly portraying a religious zealot (which may or may not be accurate historically) so I don't think anyone would argue that an Epicurean would endorse that motivation. But someone could act similarly without a religious motivation, and the main reason for bringing up the Brown figure is the reason Joshua gave - to illustrate divergence of opinion on justice. In "Things To Come" we don't have religion as a factor at all, and I think we do have a totally safe illustration on views of feeling and pleasure we can debate in detail.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRRXtymX50U>

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 29, 2021 at 11:45 PM

Tranquility is itself a pleasure. It is not a character trait as the Stoics would hold, but rather a state of being free from troubles and anxiety. It is the state of being free from unfulfilled desires and fear of pain or memories of pain. One can feel untroubled by unfulfilled desires by realizing that the things that are most needed are simple to fulfill. Fears are dispelled by realizing that most fears are unfounded. Pains that cannot be overcome will not last long when severe, and when mild one can yet enjoy pleasures. These ideas are reframed in my own words from the jstor article.

Post by “Eikadistes” of November 30, 2021 at 9:26 AM

One point of interest I've observed while documenting translations is the semantic treatment of pain. Epicurus uses either *algoun* or *lypoumen* (or inflections thereof) when referring to pain. *Algoun* seems to describe all forms of pain, both physical and psychological. *Lypoumen*, on the other hand, is almost exclusively used to describe mental anguish. Several times, Epicurus has to preface the word *algoun* with *sarks*, meaning "flesh" or "body" to distinguish the physical nature of *algoun* because there **is no** word for "*just physical pain*". *Algoun*, by itself, is not enough to indicate the quality of the pain. Overwhelmingly, Epicurus uses the word *algoun*, **by itself**, without distinguishing whether the Pain is mental or physical.

Based on the words he chooses to use in the *Doxai*, the concept of bodily discomfort and mental anguish are both subsumed under the larger category of Pain. Epicurus identifies the goal of life as relieving pain (all pain), not *just* mental anguish. Prioritizing mental tranquility without addressing physical circumstances is the beginning of delusion.

Even when dying of kidney stones, *aponia* is still relevant: adjust your position to ease the tension in your joints, consider the consequences of adopting a better posture, regulate fluid intake to manage the discomfort, find your "goldilocks" zone so you feel cool and at ease, keep a towel or cloth around to absorb perspiration, ask to be surrounded by friends and smiling faces rather than a cold, lonely hospital bed. To deny any of these comforts is to neglect the needs of the body and dull the very sensory mechanisms that allowed us to understand disease in the first place.

I challenge anyone with a viscous hangover to stand in front of a class and convince a room full of students that mental tranquility, by itself, is enough to allow them to overcome their vicious hangover. Not gonna happen.

Post by “Cassius” of November 30, 2021 at 9:37 AM

I firmly agree Nate. I get the sense that the Stoic influence leads people to think that Epicurus is pushing something similar to their "mind over matter" approach and I think (1) they are totally wrong and (2) it's important to hit on this very hard so that we eliminate the confusion. It's hard enough to show people how important good philosophy is without them thinking at the very beginning of the road that the road leads to ignoring the pleasure and pain of the here and now.

Post by “Joshua” of November 30, 2021 at 10:00 AM

Quote

To deny any of these comforts is to neglect the needs of the body and dull the very sensory mechanisms that allowed us to understand dis-ease in the first place.

The *needs* of the body, but also the *claims* of the body, in so far as they do not bring too much trouble to relieve or fulfill. Dwelling too much on the needs of the body gets us only so far as Buddhism, and does not do justice to the full measure of the life of pleasure that awaits us.

Thank you for the etymology, @Nate !

Post by “Cassius” of November 30, 2021 at 10:05 AM

Yep I agree there too for exactly the reason Joshua stated.

I don't want to always be in the mode of reacting, and reacting negatively, to Buddhism and Stoicism and the like as if they're the only thing that's worth talking about, but if we're realistic about the place that most general readers of Epicurus are in November of 2021, I think it's fair to say that most of them have been exposed to so much argument from that direction that they think it's a given that Epicurus was saying the same thing.

So i think that's where we have so much opportunity and can have a real impact - in showing how wrong that picture is.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 30, 2021 at 1:34 PM

I want to make a simple table comparing tranquility in Epicureanism vs. Stoicism, to make it easier to see and remember the differences. Will share when completed.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 30, 2021 at 1:42 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

n "Santa Fe Trail" Massey is clearly portraying a religious zealot

He speaks about "conquering"...this seems antithetical to Epicurus' teachings. I wonder if there also a noticable shift in Epicureanism, from Epicurus' time to Cicero's time? And this difference also leads to differing interpretations of Epicureanism.

Post by “Cassius” of November 30, 2021 at 2:14 PM

Kalosyni yes you're right that language is a little over the top. The key issue would be more at the level of how to analyze the question of pursuing pleasures that come only at the cost of danger and how to compare that with an attitude of avoiding danger at all cost.

Unfortunately the loss of subtly arises from viewing just the final scene without the rest of the movie. In general the prior sections are probably consistent with much that most people here probably agree, in a generally nonpolitical sense, of having a general attitude of how "science" properly employed can help end war and bring all sorts of other beneficial results - but not without costs.

The British accent of the characters is kind of hard to understand at various places, but in general I am pretty comfortable recommending the film as setting up a lot of very important questions and implying an answer that is generally in an Epicurean direction -- but only through confronting this issue that sometimes great pleasures can come at great costs, and it's essential to think about how to make those difficult decisions.

Post by “Don” of November 30, 2021 at 9:58 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

Algoun seems to describe all forms of pain, both physical and psychological. Lypoumen, on the other hand, is almost exclusively used to describe mental anguish. Several times, Epicurus has to preface the word algoun with sarks, meaning "flesh" or "body" to distinguish the physical nature of algoun because there is no word for "just physical pain". Algoun, by itself, is not enough to indicate the quality of the pain. Overwhelmingly, Epicurus uses the word algoun, by itself, without distinguishing whether the Pain is mental or physical.



Excellent insights!

For anyone curious:

αλγος (algos (noun) > algoun particle "feeling pain, suffering")

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἄλγος](#)

λυπεω <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...57:entry=lupe/w>

Neither distinguishes bodily or mental specifically as Nate noted!

And I've found some of the connotations of σαρξ sarx interesting especially "the *physical* or *natural order* of things, opp. the spiritual or supernatural"

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, σάρξ](#)

I'm really looking forward to reading your linguistic exploration of the PDs!

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 30, 2021 at 11:32 PM

I will not do a tranquility table of comparison after-all. But there is this difference between Epicurus and the Stoics:

Epicurus -- the happy person will be unperturbed.

Stoics -- the sage will be unperturbable: nothing that happens can possibly bring him any trouble.

Quote

"I will argue that tranquility was in fact not a serious contender for the position of ultimate good in ancient times"

Epicurus: "As he was known, he was a hedonist, who believed that the good, for humans at least, is pleasure, and therefore the best life must be the most pleasant."

From Gisela Striker article:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27903171>

Post by "Godfrey" of December 1, 2021 at 1:05 AM

[Kalosyni](#) thanks for the link. A very good take on tranquility!

Post by "Cassius" of December 1, 2021 at 4:02 AM

Yes that is indeed a promising looking article. Thank you Kalosyni!

In this paper I would like to examine a conception of happiness that seems to have become popular after the time of Plato and Aristotle: tranquillity or, as one might also say, peace of mind. This conception is interesting for two reasons: first, because it seems to come from outside the tradition that began with Plato or Socrates, second, because it is the only conception of *eudaimonia* in Greek ethics that identifies happiness with a state of mind and makes it depend entirely on a person's attitude or beliefs. In this way it may be closer to more recent ideas about happiness, notably those of utilitarians who treat "happiness" as a synonym of "pleasure," than to the classical Greek conceptions of the good life. For Plato and Aristotle (and in fact for the Hellenistic philosophers too, including the hedonist Epicurus) the happy life certainly had to be pleasant or enjoyable, but they did not think that happiness itself consisted in being pleased with one's life. As the (somewhat unorthodox) Stoic Seneca puts it, "it is not that virtue is chosen because it pleases, but that, if chosen, it also pleases."¹ I will argue that tranquillity was in fact not a serious contender for the position of ultimate good in ancient times. Greek theories of happiness from Plato to Epicurus were attempts to spell out what sort of a life one would have to lead in order to have good reasons for feeling tranquil or contented; they were not recipes for reaching a certain state of mind. Looking at the case of tranquillity will show, I think, that modern philosophers interested in questions about the good life might be well advised to follow the lead of their ancient predecessors.

I have chosen the term 'tranquillity' to represent what is in fact a family

Post by "Cassius" of December 1, 2021 at 4:27 AM

Couple of comments on that article. First: i wish she had included a cite on where to find this in Aristotle, but I think this true and a crucial observation for Epicureans to understand about the prevailing view that Epicurus faced:

soul is the seat of (each person's) *daimōn* (cf. DK 68B 170, 171). Besides, one would think that cheerfulness or peace of mind could hardly be argued to meet the exacting standards that Aristotle sets up for the highest good – namely that it be complete, desired only for its own sake, self-sufficient, and such that no added good could make it any better. Tranquillity would be a most implausible candidate – and indeed it was not adopted as a full conception of the end by any one of the more important Hellenistic schools of philosophy – except for the Pyrrhonist sceptics, who had no theory at all. But before I look at the role of tranquillity in Pyrrhonism, let us see what role it had to play in the positive doctrines of Epicurus and the Stoics.

That is why I argue that PD3, and all Epicurean discussion of "absence of pain" as constituting the highest state of pleasure, is really aimed at establishing pleasure as the highest good, not at making the point that modernists allege (they allege that absence of pain is some uniquely desirable special kind of pleasure - a "fancy pleasure" as described in Elayne's article).

In truth, I would argue, PD3 and PD4 are like PD1 and PD2 - they are statements that establish something else and far more important than what may appear to be on the surface.

PD1, if accepted, makes it impossible to believe in the supernatural meddling gods of the majority view.

PD2, if accepted, makes it impossible to believe in life after death and in the threats and rewards of an afterlife of the majority view.

and PD3, if accepted, makes it impossible to accept the argument of Plato and Aristotle that "Pleasure" can not be the highest good.

Again, the point is this: that Plato and Aristotle and others had seemingly proved to the majority's satisfaction that pleasure alone cannot be considered to be the good. From their perspective pleasure has no "limit" - more of it is always better, so it fails to meet the test of "such that no added good could make it any better." Epicurus answers that and provides a proof of its error by pointing out that "the limit of the quantity of pleasure is the absence of pain." This produces the vessel analogy that a vessel (a human life, viewed as the maximum amount of pleasurable experience a single human can feel) can only be filled so far, and once a vessel is filled to the brim, it cannot be filled any further. Thus PD3 is in my view a backhand / roundabout way of saying what you would expect Epicurus to say: "Pleasure is the highest good."

But just as he chose to say "There are no supernatural gods" and "There is no life after death" in a roundabout way, to "inoculate" you against the reverse opinion, he said "Pleasure is the highest good" in a roundabout way, to inoculate you against accepting the specious arguments of Plato and Aristotle and the rest.

Post by “Cassius” of December 1, 2021 at 4:31 AM

I agree with this fundamental point too:

pleasures,” pleasant states as opposed to pleasant processes or events. Tranquillity was, according to him, the pleasant state of the mind, corresponding to the state of *aponia*, absence of pain, in the body; and Epicurus argued that happiness will consist in both tranquillity and *aponia*. Thus tranquillity, for Epicurus, is the state of mind of the happy person, a part of happiness, but not happiness itself.

Post by “Cassius” of December 1, 2021 at 4:34 AM

OMG YES this is so true from my point of view too! --->

treatises about tranquillity and about the happy life, makes this point explicitly several times. So for example at *vita* 15.2 he says: “Not even the joy that arises out of virtue, though a good, is a part of the absolute good itself, no more than serenity or tranquillity . . . these are goods indeed, but consequences of the highest good, not constituents of it.”¹⁰

Tranquillity came in handy for the Stoics, I think, because on the one hand they wished to ban pleasure from the good life, since the Stoic sage was supposed to be immune to emotion; on the other hand, they had to account for the Platonic and Aristotelian requirement that the good life should be enjoyable for the happy person.¹¹ Here they could appeal to tranquillity as a state of mind that would appear desirable to most people. And having set aside pleasure, together with the most common term for it (*hēdonē*, Lat. *voluptas*), they went on to say that the virtuous person’s life actually contains its own joys – not ordinary pleasures, but moral or spiritual ones.

YES!!!!
And handy
for many
modern
writers
for the
same
reason!!!

To repeat - I would contend that In the minds of many modern writers (many, not all), THAT is the reason they push "tranquility" and seek to ignore "pleasure" by redefining it as "absence of pain" - because they want to ELIMINATE pleasure from the entire discussion!

...Which means that every emphasis on tranquility and similar concepts should be rigorously and vigorously scrutinized to determine whether the writer is in fact explaining an aspect of pleasure as taught by Epicurus, or is seeking to overturn and rewrite the entire system of Epicurus to conform to Stoic principles.

And outside of Epicureanfriends.com and other contexts and writers who explicitly make this point early and often (like this Striker article), I would say that a large segment of modern "Epicurean" commentary in fact undermines and would destroy what Epicurus in fact taught.

Post by "Cassius" of December 1, 2021 at 4:46 AM

to influences that might interfere with his peace of mind.¹² While Epicurus held that the happy person will be unperturbed, the Stoics made the more ambitious claim that the sage will be imperturbable: nothing that happens can possibly bring him any trouble.

And the Stoic task was not only more "ambitious" but also unnatural, foolish, and impossible - and the list of negative adjectives could go on and on.

Post by "Cassius" of December 1, 2021 at 4:53 AM

To put it positively, then, Epicurean tranquillity is a state of contentment and inner calm that arises from the thought that one has or can easily get all that one needs, and has no reason to be afraid of anything in the future.

Epicurus did claim that the happy person will always enjoy tranquillity, but he did not claim that nothing could disturb him: one will mourn the death of a friend, for example, but since such grief can be overcome or outweighed by pleasant thoughts and memories, including grateful remembrances of the past joys of friendship, peace of mind will generally prevail. A wise man is touched but briefly by fortune's whim;¹³ he will feel some troubles, but he will never be radically thrown off balance.

I agree with this too, but due to the damnable Stoic/religious influences that are so widespread today, I think in most contexts when you can make the statement underlined in red you should go further and clarify that Epicurus did not think you reach that state through mind games (like the Stoics) but through the aggressive and vigorous study of nature and the taking of all actions that are possible to create and maintain your state of pleasurable living in the real world.

As Joshua said in the current podcast, or as Raymond Massey character says at the end of the "Things to Come" scene, the work of getting your life in order philosophically is not the end of the process, but only the beginning. Yes philosophy itself is pleasurable, but once you have your philosophical life in order you aren't finished, you're only beginning. Then and only then are you prepared and equipped to go out into the world and do what needs to be done to obtain and secure your pleasant life.

Post by "Cassius" of December 1, 2021 at 4:58 AM

So in post number [18](#) above, when Kalosyni writes:

Epicurus – the happy person will be unperturbed.
Stoics – the sage will be unperturbable: nothing that happens can possibly bring him any trouble.

There is this important clarification of 'the happy person will be unperturbed':

Epicurus did claim that the happy person will always enjoy tranquillity, but he did not claim that nothing could disturb him: one will mourn the death of a friend, for example, but since such grief can be overcome or outweighed by pleasant thoughts and memories, including grateful remembrances of the past joys of friendship, peace of mind will generally prevail. A wise man is touched but briefly by fortune's whim;¹³ he will feel some troubles, but he will never be radically thrown off balance.

Post by "Cassius" of December 1, 2021 at 5:13 AM

ETHICS

One might agree that such a person has some sort of peace of mind, but what about the positive side of tranquillity, expressed more clearly in the old Democritean term, *euthymia*? Does this not require some sort of positive emotion, rather than no emotion at all? It seems that the Stoics tried to account for this also, not of course by admitting any emotions, but by introducing some sort of positive feelings, called *eupatheiai*, states of being well affected. These go with true value-judgments, such as that someone, oneself or another, has achieved virtue, a real good. That, then, is the Stoic version of contentment. Seneca dwells at great length upon the pleasures (not to be called such, of course)¹⁴ that come with tranquillity, which is treated rather like a virtue. He enthusiastically describes the immense joy and infinite serenity of the person who has finally achieved virtue. The sage will rejoice in a wonderful sense of relief and freedom, realizing that he has reached absolute security – nothing in this world can present a danger for him any more. Thus it turns out that tranquillity, once achieved, may be a source of unending delight. Seneca combines the character-trait of tranquillity with a very positive conception of the corresponding state of mind that may well go beyond orthodox Stoicism. For other Stoics like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, the negative term *ataraxia*, absence of disturbance, seems to be dominant. Which makes one wonder whether Seneca is right in claiming that *tranquillitas* is the best Latin rendering of *euthymia*.

I agree with Gisela Striker there too. No matter how much lipstick you put on a pig, a pig is still a pig. "Ataraxia" is (like *aponia*) a *negative* term, and would in my view never be used by Epicurus as the primary way to express and convey the ultimate goal of life.

A negative term suits very well to explain why Plato and Aristotle are wrong in saying that pleasure cannot be the highest good, but a negative term is never going to take the place of *hedone*, or other words like *euthymia*, as the positive way Epicurus would articulate the guide and goal of life.

Call it a matter of style, or tone, or a 'sense of life' issue, but if there is a "Stoic personality" and an "Epicurean personality" (and I would say there probably is) then I would say that the Epicurean personality is going to find much more pleasure and affinity in the "positive" rather than the "negative." Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius just ooze with sourness and negativity and darkness and defeat.

Post by “Cassius” of December 1, 2021 at 5:18 AM

And the article concludes with a very good taking-apart of the Pyrrhonist view that happiness IS tranquility. It's impossible for me to read very much about Pyrrho without seeing him as absurd and a good example of what not to believe and to do, and that's a very good end to the article.

This is one of the best articles I have read in a long time! Thank you again Kalosyni!

[Martin](#) - I think if I were looking to nominate someone for "Foremost Living German Scholar on Epicurus" I would have to put [Gisela Striker](#)'s name near the top of the list. Can you think of anyone better?

Might be fun sometime to think about listing them by nationalities. I would put David Sedley at or near the top of the Englishmen, and I would list Boris [Nikolsky](#) as important in Russian, but I am not sure as to French or American or others.

Post by “Martin” of December 1, 2021 at 8:20 AM

I do not know of any better living German Scholar on Epicurus than Gisela Striker.

Post by “Cassius” of December 1, 2021 at 12:24 PM

I think a lot of the points in this article are relevant to conversations we have had with [Don](#) in the past, so notwithstanding his podcasting sabbatical I am looking forward to his comments on Striker's article! 😊

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 1, 2021 at 1:08 PM

Thank you [Cassius](#) for highlighting certain sections of the article and sharing your views and insights.

Good stuff on Epicureanism.... After reading the parts on Pyrrhonism, it appears to me that Zen Buddhism has some similar views to Pyrrhonism. There were two suicides at the Zen Temple I used to attend. Both were men in their 20's. Such a shame. So much for tranquility. If only they had had the ability to access more pleasure in life.

Pleasure, I firmly believe, is the antidote to the "darkness" and "heaviness" of life. But one must know and practice the best way to dance with one's pleasures.

Post by "Don" of December 1, 2021 at 3:37 PM

Striker: 👍 👍

I concur with what has been said. I'll just add several observations:

In debate he was looked down upon by no one, for he could both discourse at length and also sustain a cross-examination, so that even Nausiphanes when a young man was captivated by him : at all events he used to say that we should follow Pyrrho in disposition but himself in doctrine ; and he would often remark that Epicurus, greatly admiring Pyrrho's way of life, regularly asked him for information about Pyrrho ; DL Lives IX.11.64
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...hlight=epicurus>

So, Epicurus was evidently an admirer of Pyrrho's way of life, just not his philosophy (since he rejected Nausiphanes in the end, too)

Striker: "It seems that Democritus was concerned to admonish his fellow citizens to refrain from polypragmosyne, being busybodies and meddling with other people's affairs; advising them that cheerfulness and peace of mind are more likely to flourish in a quiet life of minding one's own business"

This sounds generally Epicurean to me.

Striker: "Skeptical tranquillity can only be reached if one does not try for it"

This sounds generally Zen Buddhist to me.

Striker: "As far as tranquillity is concerned, skepticism might do just as well, or, for that matter, drugs, since we are now not talking about how people actually live, but only about how they feel. But the suggestion that people might be made happy by an ample supply of drugs that

would make them feel euphoric or calm looks repellent to us, and would no doubt have looked repellent to the ancient Greeks also."

Striker pegged my argument against the "experience machine" here, ...but I don't want to open that kettle of fermenting fish!

Post by "Cassius" of December 1, 2021 at 4:11 PM

I had to choose between thumbs up and laugh so I choose laugh, but both apply!

Post by "Kalosyni" of December 3, 2021 at 6:29 PM

I am still contemplating the role of tranquility within Epicureanism.

Tranquility as defined as peace of mind, which would be a mental attitude. So it is that one feels untroubled and free from disturbances.

[Martin](#) said in an earlier thread:

Quote

Epicurus' philosophy is better characterized by the statement that peace of mind is required to experience maximum pleasure but is not equal to pleasure.

(And according to Striker's article tranquility is a sort of pleasure).

So now there is:

- 1) Tranquility is not the highest pleasure
- 2) Tranquility is a sort of pleasure
- 3) Tranquility is required to experience maximum pleasure

A certain amount of tranquility is required for a happy life. The tranquil person will be able to sleep soundly at night and wake up refreshed and ready to enjoy life. But those who struggle with bouts of insomnia may need to invest some time to process anxieties, etc. I myself occasionally have been dealing with insomnia. I don't think a therapist is required, but some

processing of anxiety, fear, and unfulfilled desires, is necessary. I can see that there are some PD's that might apply.

Post by “Cassius” of December 3, 2021 at 7:59 PM

Yes I agree too.

I can see the possibility of arguing reasonably against all three items that tranquility, if defined as absence of anxiety, does not meet a strict definition of a "pleasure," if we consider pleasure to be a "positive experience."

But that kind of argument would be a word game where in my view you would want to specify why you were playing it and what you hoped to accomplish. I think most people in common conversation would consider "he is tranquil" would be a common-sense description of someone enjoying some pleasure (sleep, rest, relaxation, daydreaming, etc.)

So maybe the real issue here is that confusion (or manipulation) arises when people slide back and forth between (1) common sense discussion and (2) academic word-splitting without being clear what they are doing and trying to accomplish.

The whole question of talking about "highest pleasure" sets off alarm bells in my mind because how can that discussion really have any meaning without combining it with all sorts of other qualifying terms that explain the context in which you're talking.

It's kind of like waving a globe at someone and screaming "THIS IS THE WORLD" over and over and over.

Yes, it's a representation of the world, but it's not equivalent to the world in every respect. In most cases that kind of observation goes without saying, but not always. Is the person shouting "THIS IS THE WORLD" crazy? Or are they in the middle of a legitimate but heated discussion about the best way to draw maps and theories of cartography? The context of a discussion can determine whether what the people are saying is brilliant, or insane.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 4, 2021 at 12:54 PM

I think I see some of what you are saying [Cassius](#). It might be that some of what I write might be "crazymaking" in that I am probably going around-and-around in circles, while both

forgetting the actual philosophy and making slightly off-kilter arguments. (How do I learn to stop doing that?...I need to study the basics more and take better notes, and learn how to present my ideas in a cleaner, clearer fashion).

But I think I do enjoy the "learning by hashing things out" method. I hope it isn't too annoying for people. (Am I just entertaining myself but boring others?)

So...Another way to look at this is that "the telos" is also the goal. For example, Christians have as their goal to see Jesus in heaven after they die, and that goal would both include salvation and go beyond it. But they don't have that as their only goal.

Now for Epicureans the goal is to live life the most pleasureably, because this life is the only life. And to live pleasureably both includes and goes beyond tranquility.

A question that comes up for me lately is, at what point does an Epicurean say: "I've studied the teachings and I've learned the teachings, now I will simply just live the teachings." Yet, one would not feel fully contented until one has established the fundamental material attributes underlying the Epicurean lifestyle.

Post by "Cassius" of December 4, 2021 at 1:25 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Now for Epicureans the goal is to live life the most pleasureably, because this life is the only life. And to live pleasureably both includes and goes beyond tranquility.

Yes I think a large part of the issue is that this kind of formulation (and yours here is very on point I think) is necessarily extremely broad and even "abstract." "Living pleasurable" is such a broad description that (necessarily) means so many different things to different people that its necessary to keep in mind that it's an "outline" type of statement that must be translated into reality.

Post by "Godfrey" of December 4, 2021 at 3:02 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I need to study the basics more and take better notes, and learn how to present my ideas in a cleaner, clearer fashion.

If it's of any help, over the time that I've been posting here I've found a similar need to be more precise in my wording. But I've also found that that is part of the process of learning and communicating philosophy and has been very beneficial for me.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

...at what point does an Epicurean say: "I've studied the teachings and I've learned the teachings, now I will simply just live the teachings." Yet, one would not feel fully contented until one has established the fundamental material attributes underlying the Epicurean lifestyle.

One of the best ways that I find to understand the teachings is to try to live them and then evaluate the effects in terms of enjoying my life. Participating here is part of that process: instead of a physical Garden, we have this community where we can share ideas, get feedback and continue to study. So, to me, you begin living the teachings early on and continue to do so. And you continue to study indefinitely: there's always some new nuance to appreciate and incorporate into understanding and living. Understanding is continuously growing, branching out into new areas and providing additional pleasures!

Post by “Don” of December 4, 2021 at 3:22 PM

For me, I want a philosophy of life to put into practice, and that's what I'm finding steadily more and more with Epicurus's philosophy. Something to use as a measure against which to weigh life decisions. There aren't commandments, but there are "have you considered this?" elements.

That's one of the things that drew me first to Buddhism: Buddha's teaching that "Don't take my word for it. Test what I've taught. If it works, do it. If not, throw it away." The trappings and supernatural components (ex., rebirth) steered me away.

I have found Epicureanism an eminently practical perspective rooted in the material world that gives direction to one's path thru life.

And this virtual Garden has been a big component of coming to these realizations.

Ευχαριστώ! I give thanks to all those fellow travelers in the Garden Path.

Post by “Martin” of December 5, 2021 at 9:51 PM

Quote

A question that comes up for me lately is, at what point does an Epicurean say: "I've studied the teachings and I've learned the teachings, now I will simply just live the teachings." Yet, one would not feel fully contented until one as established the fundamental material attributes underlying the Epicurean lifestyle.

After having studied "enough", the confidence that our intuition and the philosophy match comes up as an inner sensation. If pleasurable, we can keep delving into ever more details but there is no need to do so. This is similar to science: Once we have studied enough science to reach the confidence in an exclusively material world, there is no more need to study more science unless we need specific knowledge for a hedonic calculus. However, if science gives us great pleasure, we may choose it as our main hobby or profession and thereby spend a large part of our life studying or contributing to science.

While reading more Epicurean texts and contributing to the forum is pleasurable for me, I spend most of my free time on other pleasures and on preparations for other pleasures.

Post by “Joshua” of December 6, 2021 at 12:19 AM

I like the way Martin has put it.

Once you've got the core arguments right in your mind, there's room to relax. But minds are imperfect, and memory is frail---so that a certain degree of 'regular maintenance' is necessary to keep one's philosophy on a right heading.

The best way to preserve books from rotting away is to keep them in circulation, and to make new copies from time to time as the old ones fail. Papyrus crumbles, parchment fades---after a generation, nobody remembers anything. So it is with philosophy. We owe this much, I think, to our future selves---to keep the philosophical machinery of our minds in good working order: and perhaps we owe something more; something to those nameless millions as yet unborn, who have not heard the story of Epicurus of Samos. Who *will* not hear that story, unless we here and others like us are prepared to spend some small part of our own precious time in preserving it---to pass on that torch.

Because to strike a blow for Epicurus is in some measure to strike a blow against time itself, and forgetfulness. Consider--the whole history of our species up to this moment has transpired before the Milky Way galaxy has completed a tenth of one percent of its rotation! We bloom for a day, we lucky few; and in a flash our lives are gone, withered like grapes on the vine.

But though the vine wither, the Garden still has her secrets. By the end of a century no part of her is left unchanged. This plant dies, and that plant dies---

And the Garden remains. In what seems the bleakest winter, all of her hope lies hidden---tucked away in a seed.

Ah, but such seeds! In a monastery in Germany in 1417, a poem sprouted that had lain dormant for a thousand years, unfolding in its spreading leaves the knowledge of nature, and the way things are. Another of these, Italy held in her bosom; mouldering but not lost, buried under a hundred feet of volcanic ash, a cache of papyrus scrolls in 1750 sent forth green tendrils; fresh thoughts from long ago, winding their way through the dark tunnels of the lost villa toward living daylight. Then in 1884, in Turkey on the coast of Asia---where, knitted into cold barren stone, the very words of Epicurus himself were found to have taken root. Indeed, even the library of the Vatican itself came to bear this startling, alien and ancient fruit.

Who knows but that the hand of a child may not bury that acorn, whose growth comes to tower over every other oak. For a seed is so small a thing---and in the planting, it is *then* that we strike our greatest blow. But how should we do this?

Something comes to mind;

Quote

[VS41](#). We must laugh and philosophize at the same time and do our household duties and employ our other faculties, and never cease proclaiming the sayings of the true philosophy.

Post by “Cassius” of December 6, 2021 at 6:40 AM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

But minds are imperfect, and memory is frail---so that a certain degree of 'regular maintenance' is necessary to keep one's philosophy on a right heading

Yes that is true and in addition even the best minds and memories are influenced by our surroundings - the Epicurean material on images stresses that. So that when we are surrounded by antiEpicurean images every day, as most of us are, we have to take steps to inoculate ourselves from their influence.

I don't like always sounding the "call to battle" alarm but I think it is clear that such a conflict is constantly going on whether we acknowledge it or not. Unless we find a desert island and live without TV and internet that's unlikely to change.

It appears even the [Epicurean gods](#) weren't unchanging as the basis of their deathlessness but that they found the power to replace their own makeup from the flow of atoms - a useful analogy for us I think (Joshua's "regular maintenance").

Post by "Don" of December 6, 2021 at 6:57 AM

Eloquently stated, [Joshua](#) !!

One thing that strikes me as I read your writing was that, like science, if the philosophy of Epicurus is ever truly lost, there's a chance someone in the future would recreate - or rediscover - it on their own under a different name.

Being based on natural principals and having a foundation in a material world, one could, if necessary, "discover" that the world is built of "little seeds", that the "soul" dies with the body, that if there are "gods" (of that concept arises) that they don't bother us, the rational pursuit of pleasure is a worthy goal, and so on.

I find it very difficult to believe that the same could be said for Christian substitution theology or even virtue-based Stoicism. Maybe some kind of "Buddhist" "science of mind" involving meditation because the mind is always there to study and engage in introspection.

But I've heard this argument from scientists and agnostics/atheists: that science is "rediscoverable" and religion is not. Some new form of theology would emerge to control the masses and to strike fear into them. But scientific principles are manifest in the universe: $E=mc^2$, the Earth goes around the sun, etc. I would include living beings are attracted to pleasure and avoid pain in there which underpins the philosophy we know as Epicurus's but in the future could be "resurrected" by someone else independent of knowledge of the Garden. That doesn't mean we don't respect or honor Epicurus now since the philosophy does spring from him and we know it now. I think I take comfort in this rediscoverability, but I'm curious if anyone agrees or has any thoughts iin this direction.

Post by “Cassius” of December 6, 2021 at 8:17 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

that science is "rediscoverable" and religion is not.

It might be necessary to be a little more precise about the meaning of "religion." I would expect that Christianity or Judaism or precise religions would not be rediscoverable, but there seems to be a lot in the Epicurean texts about how humans sort of "naturally" fell into the mistake of thinking that there are supernatural forces.

So in the generic sense of "religion" meaning "belief in something supernatural" that might be something that humans on desert islands might not only rediscover but be "naturally" inclined towards.

Just thinking out loud there mostly.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 6, 2021 at 11:35 AM

I agree about rediscoverability, but on a less hypothetical note religion has become a dominant power structure and will always use any vestige of its tremendous resources to see that its ideas, and therefore power, prevail.

It seems to me that "realists" don't often see the need to fight for their beliefs as they are self evident. Meanwhile the "idealists" expend great effort defending and spreading their beliefs. Could this be due to the fears inherent in "idealism"? Particularly the fear of looking like a fool? This in addition to the craving for power.

Post by “Cassius” of December 6, 2021 at 12:54 PM

.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Could this be due to the fears inherent in "idealism"? Particularly the fear of looking like a fool?

I agree with your comment about craving for power. I don't think I have heard you comment previously about fear being inherent in idealism. What are your thoughts on that?

Post by “Godfrey” of December 6, 2021 at 2:12 PM

I'm just speculating that when you believe in and promote something with no empirical basis, it would be natural to fear having your beliefs shown as groundless. Not an obvious fear on the surface but a deep seeded one that you would only become aware of by paying attention to your sensations, preconceptions and feelings.

I've noticed this in myself various times in different contexts. I may have a feeling that I'm digging my heels in about some issue, but when I examine my faculties I realize that I'm reacting this way because I don't have all of the facts and my ego is perhaps digging in. I'm describing this ego reaction as fear.

But for those who are promoting a "noble lie" in order to achieve certain ends, having their falsity exposed could truly be dangerous and worthy of fearing. At the very least it would be a threat to their power, which such a person would presumably fear.

Also, when I wrote that comment I was specifically thinking of religion. The fears inherent in that are, of course, fearing gods and death, as well as what I've just described.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 6, 2021 at 4:28 PM

I am enjoying reading everyone's comments, such good and helpful insights!

[Godfrey](#) ...this comes up for me after reading what you wrote...That the "fear" and the need to defend ideology/religion arises due to how the mind forms concepts.

The Tao te Ching (Stephen Mitchell translation) says:

Quote

"When people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly.

When people see some things as good, other things become bad.

Being and non-being create each other.

Difficult and easy support each other.

Long and short define each other.

High and low depend on each other.

Before and after follow each other."

Display More

I am currently contemplating how Taoism compares with Epicureanism. It seems that some of it fits, but yet other aspects are too much like Pyrrhonism/Skepticism.

Post by "Godfrey" of December 6, 2021 at 6:04 PM

[Kalosyni](#) the first two lines of that quote seem particularly spot on.

The attached thesis paper may be of interest, "Friedrich Nietzsche, The Presocratic Greeks, and Taoist Thought" by Deborah Theodore. I read it quite a while ago so I can't remember the details other than I enjoyed it and I believe it had some pertinent information in it.

Post by "Don" of December 7, 2021 at 12:33 PM

I did want to add that I concur with the thoughts above that I think the idea of some kind of supernatural power probably would be rediscovered or never go away. That concept along with an afterlife seems to go back well into the prehistoric origins of humans. But the specific manifestations of Shiva, Odin, Yahweh, Zeus, Ahura-Mazda, etc. are unlikely to be rediscovered as well as the rites texts associated with them.

Post by "Martin" of December 8, 2021 at 8:30 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2262-why-tranquility-should-not-be-the-main-goal-for-an-epicurean/>

I agree with rediscoverability of the major ideas of Epicurus' philosophy in a similarly consistent way.

Post by “Cassius” of December 8, 2021 at 8:41 AM

I think I will just insert this random thought here:

I think some people who start out in reading Epicurus read so much about the word "ataraxia" that they conclude from sheer dominance of discussion that ataraxia was the focus of Epicurus' work.

It would probably help them to lose their fixation on ataraxia to realize that the entirely separate word "aponia" was used for "absence of pain." It seems to me intuitively that if someone wanted to go off in the wrong direction and fixate on one of these words as the goal rather than pleasure, it would make more sense to fixate on "aponia" than "ataraxia." And that would also be more accurate from the point of view of the measurement of quantity and canonic aspect since - given that pain and pleasure are the only two passions - in terms of quantity "absence of pain" and "fullness of pleasure" would mean the same thing.

Once you realize that there is not one but two Greek words that are used in this context, maybe it becomes more understandable that it's necessary to look deeper - back to the original word of pleasure - than to take these other statements about tranquility and absence of pain in isolation.

Post by “Pacatus” of December 19, 2021 at 1:56 PM

Thank you for this thread. My comments fold some of what I've absorbed reading this with thoughts I'd already come to.

First, I identify as an introvert. I learned long ago the definition of an introvert as someone who tends to replenish their energy more in solitude than with others, though they may still find great pleasure in the company of others - especially friends. I have known extroverts who, being the opposite sort, found much alone-time to be tiring. Except for a few on the hard edges of the spectrum, most of us likely find ourselves in some range of "ambiversion."

I enjoy measures of both solitude and company. That is just part of my personal hedonic calculus.

Similarly for tranquility (*atarxia*) and other pleasures. I can experience *tranquillitas* alone and in the company of others. And I don't find it in conflict with other pleasures, any more than I find the pleasure of a good afternoon nap in conflict with the pleasure of a glass of wine. And tranquility, for me, does not imply stillness - just a non-turmoiled mind. I can experience tranquility in meditation as well as while watching an exciting sports event. again, it's just all part of my personal hedonic calculus - lesson which has taken a long time to learn.

I find in Epicureanism, as I understand it thus far, a kind of relaxation - perhaps like letting out a long sigh - that I do not find in, say, Stoicism or Zen. Though the path does take practice, it does not seem to be a gritting-of-the-teeth sort. That's why, in part, that I decided to revisit it.

