

Episode One Hundred Thirty-Nine - The Letter to Menoecus 06 - Pleasure Part Two

Post by “Cassius” of September 7, 2022 at 11:42 AM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Thirty-Nine of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

Today we continue our discussion of Pleasure in [Epicurus' Letter to Menoecus](#). Now let's join Joshua reading today's text:

BAILEY:

And again independence of desire we think a great good — not that we may at all times enjoy but a few things, but that, if we do not possess many, we may enjoy the few in the genuine persuasion that those have the sweetest pleasure in luxury who least need it, and that all that is natural is easy to be obtained, but that which is superfluous is hard. And so plain savours bring us a pleasure equal to a luxurious diet, when all the pain due to want is removed; and bread and water produce the highest pleasure, when one who needs them puts them to his lips.

[131] To grow accustomed therefore to simple and not luxurious diet gives us health to the full, and makes a man alert for the needful employments of life, and when after long intervals we approach luxuries disposes us better towards them, and fits us to be fearless of fortune.

When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind.

[132] For it is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit.

Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy: for from prudence are sprung all the other virtues, and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly, (nor, again, to live a life of prudence, honor, and justice) without living pleasantly. For the virtues are by nature bound up with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life is inseparable from them.

HICKS:

Again, we regard independence of outward things as a great good, not so as in all cases to use little, but so as to be contented with little if we have not much, being honestly persuaded that they have the sweetest enjoyment of luxury who stand least in need of it, and that whatever is natural is easily procured and only the vain and worthless hard to win. Plain fare gives as much pleasure as a costly diet, when once the pain of want has been removed, while bread and water confer the highest possible pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips.

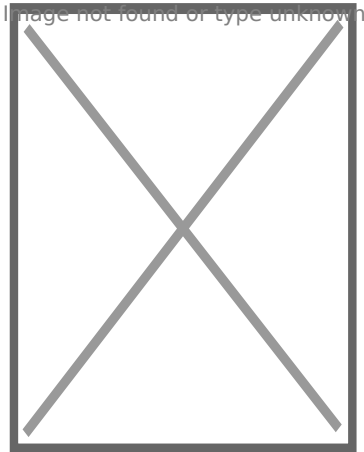
[131] To habituate one's self, therefore, to simple and inexpensive diet supplies all that is needful for health, and enables a man to meet the necessary requirements of life without shrinking, and it places us in a better condition when we approach at intervals a costly fare and renders us fearless of fortune.

When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or wilful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul.

[132] It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of revelry, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul. Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy; from it spring all the other virtues, for it teaches that we cannot lead a life of pleasure which is not also a life of prudence, honour, and justice; nor lead a life of prudence, honour, and justice, which is not also a life of pleasure. For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life, and a pleasant life is inseparable from them.

Post by “Don” of September 7, 2022 at 11:56 AM

For those interested:



[Letter To Menoikeus: A New Translation With Commentary : Don Boozar : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2655-episode-one-hundred-thirty-nine-the-letter-to-menoceus-06-pleasure-part-two/)

A new translation of the Letter to Menoikeus (Menoceus) by Epicurus with commentary.
archive.org

Additionally, we believe αὐτάρκεια is a great good. Not so that we are furnished with the use of a few things; but, if we were to have many things, we would be content with few things. Those in need who are genuinely convinced of this find extravagance more pleasant, and that every natural desire is easily procured, and an empty desire difficult to get. For simple flavors bring equal pleasure to extravagant ways of life when once the pain of body and mind experienced through lack or deficiency is removed. [131] A simple meal of hearty, wholesome bread and spring water delivers the most extreme pleasure whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst; and, when extravagant experiences do come up every once in a while, they are experienced more intensely by us, and we are better able to fearlessly face the vicissitudes of fortune.

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say the pleasure of those who are prodigal like those who are ignorant, those who don't agree with us, or those who believe wrongly; but we mean that which neither pains the body nor troubles the mind. [132] For it is not an endless string of drinking parties and festivals, and not taking advantage of slaves and women, nor does an extravagant table of fish and other things bring forth a sweet life but self-controlled reasoning and examining the cause of every choice and rejection and driving out the greatest number of opinions that take hold of the mind and bring confusion and trouble.

And so the foundation of all these and the greatest good is φρόνησις, practical wisdom. On this account, practical wisdom is prized more dearly than philosophy itself, and from practical wisdom springs forth all the remaining virtues, teaching us that a pleasurable life does not exist without the traits of wisdom, morality, and justice; nor do the traits of wisdom, morality, and

justice without pleasure: because the virtues grow together with a pleasurable life and the pleasurable life is inseparable from these.

Personally, one of the biggest epiphanies for me while doing my translation and commentary on the letter was the "bread and water" section in 131. Realizing that that was NOT an ascetic instruction but rather the basic meal of regular ancient Greeks was eye-opening.

Another eye-opener for me was the vocabulary used in the "not taking advantage of slaves (or boys) and women" section.

Feel free to read my commentary at Internet Archive and let me know if you agree with my conclusions. We're all here to grow.

Post by "Cassius" of September 11, 2022 at 10:24 PM

Episode 139 - The Letter to Menoecus 06 - On Pleasure (Part Two) - is now available!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/51223674>

Post by "Don" of September 12, 2022 at 9:39 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

A simple meal of hearty, wholesome bread and spring water delivers the most extreme pleasure whenever food and drink have been brought to bear against hunger and thirst

You did a good job summarizing, [Joshua](#) 👍

Good job everyone! A solid episode!

[Joshua](#) also mentioned my aversion to "profligate." Here's that section from my commentary:

131h. οὐ τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐν ἀπολαύσει κειμένας λέγομεν,

- οὐ ...λέγομεν, "we don't say ..."
- τὰς τῶν ἀσώτων ἡδονὰς "the pleasure of those who are ἀσώτων"
 - ἀσώτων (genitive of ἄσωτος (asōtos))

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2655-episode-one-hundred-thirty-nine-the-letter-to-menoecus-06-pleasure-part-two/>

- LSJ defines ἄσωτος as "having no hope of safety, in desperate case; abandoned; spendthrift, profligate." The Latin synonym given is *perditus* "squander, dissipate, waste, throw away, lost"

A quick diversion on ἄσωτος is in order. For those readers with a background in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the parable of the Prodigal Son uses this exact word to describe the lifestyle chosen by the wayward son: *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.* (Luke 15:13, KJV) Here ἄσωτος is translated as "riotous living." The word also occurs in one other place, this time in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures (known to Christians as the "Old" Testament) to describe a sex worker, calling her ἀνεπτερωμένη "inciting" and ἄσωτος "carnal." (Proverbs 7:11) The original connotation of "having no hope" or "lost" gives an extra dimension to the word. The word literally is formed from ἀ- ("not") + σώζω (sōizō "save"): "not saved, lost, desperate." That sense, along with the "extravagant, prodigal, profligate," gives me a much richer sense of what Epicurus's point was.

It needs to also be pointed out that, unlike those Biblical references, there's no moral judgment being passed here. All pleasure is good. It's a question of the consequences. We'll discuss this after we examine how Epicurus describes the pleasure of those who are described as ἄσωτος.

Post by "Kalosyni" of September 12, 2022 at 12:39 PM

I don't think I expressed clearly enough in the podcast that removal of pain is the beginning or start of pleasure, and when the experience of pleasure has no mixed-in or co-existing feelings of pain then this is the pinnacle of pleasure and at this pinnacle we are living as the gods. In other words the highest form of sensual pleasure (at it's height) will also be free from mental pain (we will be free from worry and fear).

Post by "Cassius" of September 12, 2022 at 1:47 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

In other words the highest form of sensual pleasure (at it's height) will also be free from mental pain (we will be free from worry and fear).

Let me ask a question about this for Kalosyni or anyone:

We have from three separate sources this well-attested statement of Epicurus about knowing "the good":

Quote

Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, XII p. 546E: Not only Aristippus and his followers, but also Epicurus and his welcomed kinetic pleasure; I will mention what follows, to avoid speaking of the "storms" {of passion} and the "delicacies" which Epicurus often cites, and the "stimuli" which he mentions in his *On the End-Goal*. For he says "For I at least do not even know what I should conceive the good to be, if I eliminate the pleasures of taste, and eliminate the pleasures of sex, and eliminate the pleasures of listening, and eliminate the pleasant motions caused in our vision by a visible form."

Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Philosophers*, X.6: It is observed too that in his treatise *On the End-Goal*, he writes in these terms: "I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, sexual pleasures, the pleasures of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form."

Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, III.18.41: Why do we shirk the question, Epicurus, and why do we not confess that we mean by pleasure what you habitually say it is, when you have thrown off all sense of shame? Are these your words or not? For instance, in that book which embraces all your teaching (for I shall now play the part of translator, so no one may think I am inventing) you say this: "For my part I find no meaning which I can attach to what is termed good, if I take away from it the pleasures obtained by taste, if I take away the pleasures which come from listening to music, if I take away too the charm derived by the eyes from the sight of figures in movement, or other pleasures by any of the senses in the whole man. Nor indeed is it possible to make such a statement as this - that it is joy of the mind which is alone to be reckoned as a good; for I understand by a mind in a state of joy, that it is so, when it has the hope of all the pleasures I have named - that is to say the hope that nature will be free to enjoy them without any blending of pain." And this much he says in the words I have quoted, so that anyone you please may realize what Epicurus understands by pleasure.

If "freedom from pain" amounts to the highest sensual pleasure, would you expect that "freedom from pain" or "freedom from disturbance" could just as easily have been listed among these (taste / sex / sound / dance) that Epicurus chose to list? If so, why? If not, why not?

Post by "Kalosyni" of September 12, 2022 at 2:07 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If "freedom from pain" amounts to the highest sensual pleasure, would you expect that "freedom from pain" or "freedom from disturbance" could just as easily have been listed among these (taste / sex / sound / dance) that Epicurus chose to list? If so, why? If not, why not?

Just to clarify -- I am not saying that when you don't feel pain that is exactly the same as pleasure. What I am saying is that if you have some pain mixed into your experience of sensuality then you are not yet experiencing the most pleasurable sensuality. The best experience of sensuality doesn't have pain mixed in to it.

I am basing this on contemplation of the experience of feeling in the body as it arises. So I don't have any direct Epicurean source for this idea.

But I believe that this is important to think about because I believe that this could be at the source of something getting lost in translation. The goal isn't a kind of "boring existence" of neutral feeling in the body which doesn't have pain and therefore qualifies as a state of pleasantness. But the goal is maximizing the sweetest sensations of pleasure by seeing that we haven't yet reached the "purest" feeling of pleasure if we are also still feeling pain in the body (over-indulgences) or the mind (anxiety/fear).

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 12, 2022 at 2:26 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

In other words the highest form of sensual pleasure (at it's height) will also be free from mental pain (we will be free from worry and fear).

Also, this has to do with a certain segment in time -- it isn't going to be at every moment of every day -- But rather it will unfold depending on a given situation. Ideally we will experience some parts of our day in this way -- we will have the experience of situations that feel very sweet and enjoyable.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 12, 2022 at 2:39 PM

Quote

“For my part I find no meaning which I can attach to what is termed good, if I take away from it the pleasures obtained by taste, if I take away the pleasures which come from listening to music, if I take away too the charm derived by the eyes from the sight of figures in movement, or other pleasures by any of the senses in the whole man. Nor indeed is it possible to make such a statement as this – that it is joy of the mind which is alone to be reckoned as a good; for I understand by a mind in a state of joy, that it is so, when it has the hope of all the pleasures I have named – that is to say the hope that nature will be free to enjoy them without any blending of pain.” And this much he says in the words I have quoted, so that anyone you please may realize what Epicurus understands by pleasure. (Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, III.18.41)

[Cassius](#) --It does seem to be listed, and maybe this is the only location?

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2022 at 3:06 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Cassius --It does seem to be listed, and maybe this is the only location

Is it listed in the same way such that it appears to be parallel or could have been included in the original listing?

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2022 at 5:21 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If "freedom from pain" amounts to the highest sensual pleasure, would you expect that "freedom from pain" or "freedom from disturbance" could just as easily have been listed among these (taste / sex / sound / dance) that Epicurus chose to list? If so, why? If not, why not?

By definition, "freedom from pain" = "filled with pleasure" so I don't think he *had* list specifically list it for it to be intrinsically there already. Note also that all three reference you give appear to be citing Epicurus's On the End-Goal (listed in Diogenes Laertius as On the Telos Περὶ τέλους. It just seems Cicero is quoting more of the text.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The goal isn't a kind of "boring existence" of neutral feeling in the body which doesn't have pain and therefore qualifies as a state of pleasantness. But the goal is maximizing the sweetest sensations of pleasure by seeing that we haven't yet reached the "purest" feeling of pleasure if we are also still feeling pain in the body (over-indulgences) or the mind (anxiety/fear).

I like that summary very much.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

In other words the highest form of sensual pleasure (at it's height) will also be free from mental pain (we will be free from worry and fear).

Also, this has to do with a certain segment in time -- it isn't going to be at every moment of every day -- But rather it will unfold depending on a given situation. Ideally we will experience some parts of our day in this way -- we will have the experience of situations that feel very sweet and enjoyable.

Well put again! I would add - from my perspective - one of the goals is to increase those "segments of time" to be both longer and more frequent. And - again from my perspective - that's why cultivating "tranquility" and "peace of mind" is important: it allows us to have a "tranquil" baseline and to be less easily perturbed/disturbed. We will experience the bites of anger, annoyance, etc., but we won't be swept away by them.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Is it listed in the same way such that it appears to be parallel or could have been included in the original listing?

I'm not quite sure of what you're asking here? Could you expand on that? One thought: there is not way to know what was in the original text by Epicurus - the "original listing" - which is lost except for these fragments.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 12, 2022 at 6:06 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Well put again! I would add - from my perspective - one of the goals is to increase those "segments of time" to be both longer and more frequent. And - again from my perspective - that's why cultivating "tranquility" and "peace of mind" is important: it allows us to have a "tranquil" baseline and to be less easily perturbed/disturbed. We will experience the bites of anger, annoyance, etc., but we won't be swept away by them.

Practically speaking, I completely agree with this. "Cultivating tranquility" is both mental and physical as well: it only makes sense since the mental is actually based in the physical. There's nothing mystical about this and such cultivation might include things like studying natural science, contemplating philosophy, doing deep breathing exercises, taking a hot bath, spending time in a hammock with a cold drink while feeling a breeze and observing the scenery. Or watching the stars and night. Or fully concentrating on a simple task... &c.

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2022 at 6:27 PM

The reason for the question is to harl back to the debate on "katastematic pleasure", which may may not be related to tranquility, and to ask whether indeed either or both of those terms is in fact a "sensual pleasure" at all. (This question is the theme of the Wentham essay in our files section.)

There is a question as to whether it is indeed "sensual pleasure" which establishes how Epicurus recognizes the good, and whether "absence of pain" describes an identifiable sensual pleasure itself, or whether it describes instead a condition in which other / sensual pleasures are experienced without any mixture of pain or disruption.

Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2022 at 6:39 PM

I know several of us have talked about this essay before, but I am not sure Kalosyni has and it relates to her points in the way I am raising so she may want to check it -

File

[Mathew Wenham - On Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure In Epicurus](#)



The standard interpretation of the concept of katastematic pleasure in Epicurus leads to fundamental contradictions in his theory. I claim that it is not Epicurus, but the standard interpretation that generates these errors...



Cassius

June 30, 2022 at 8:34 AM

Post by “Don” of September 13, 2022 at 8:22 AM

I haven't reviewed Wenham's paper but my kinetic / katastematic opinion is that kinetic pleasures are predicated on external forces acting upon us, katastematic pleasures arise from within ourselves (within our own minds). I'll need to substantiate that with texts, but that's my starting point.

Post by “Cassius” of September 13, 2022 at 9:39 AM

Unwinding the katestematic/kinetic issue, and these issues that we are talking about in this section, could and would consume our entire attention if we let it. Here's [another article](#) that came through my email today on the same topic asking the same questions:

Music - Ataraxic Tranquility At The End

© Copyright © 2022 Epicurean Friends, LLC. All rights reserved. See www.epicureanfriends.com

...enters with atoms meet or arise from the investigation of pleasure and cannot transcend it, disturbance results in avoiding pain and seeking a halt to desire. It is in craving one's desire that a form of pleasure that coincides with atoms can be found. Thus, the pursuit of pleasure is not abandoned as excessive at all, rather, it seems to be entirely satisfied by engaging physical and mental suffering. But to insist on it being satisfied frames atoms not as the opposite of pleasure, but rather as another pleasure. In the Letter to Menoeceus, we can read the often-quoted claim:

It is for the sake of this, namely freedom from pain and trouble [ataraxia and apatheia], that we are in life. These [the conditions to avoid], are more in the end is granted since the animal has no need to go in search of something that is lacking or to look for anything that he which he may fulfill the goal of the soul and the body. (To Menoeceus, 128)¹⁰

The claim is surprising. How can the combination of ataraxia and apatheia be equivalent to the common domain where it is a basic tenet of Epicureanism that pleasure is the good and the goal? If pleasure is the beginning and the end, shouldn't we seek to maximize it?

The idea that the absence of pain and mental trouble depends not at all on a lack of pleasure (and therefore happiness) and that we must seek to be unable to feel pleasure is the Epicurean moral education that is frequently mentioned. What people would assume that the absence of pain and anxiety constitutes, at best, only a second mental state, which pleasure begins once and beyond the removal of pain and trouble, that is to say, pleasure begins with more positive stimulation. Cicero (an otherwise sharp critic of the Epicurean attempt at natural philosophy or theology) reports the argument in these terms:

Epicurus did not think that there was some intermediate stage between pleasure and pain, for that was which some people think is intermediate, i.e. the absence of all pain, is not only pleasure but it is even the greatest pleasure, for whenever someone attains the state which he has no more to desire for in pleasure or in pain. But Epicurus thinks that the limit for the greatest pleasure is not the absence of all pain and although lower pleasures can be added and advanced, it cannot be transcended or augmented (De Fin. 1, 98)

We can and will continue to discuss this issue because it is like a veil over the whole of Epicurean philosophy, and unless we lift it we never get to actually living and applying the Epicurean worldview. That's one of the reasons I think I will always see Lucretius as the real starting point to Epicurus. Lucretius explains the nature of the world and our place in it in practical terms and he never gets lost in "absence of pain" or seems to consider this issue important at all. I don't really think that Epicurus or the founding Greek Epicureans did either, thus we don't see this issue obsessed over in the texts we have left, and there's no hint that it was a major topic in other texts that are lost.

Our challenge, I think, is to articulate an understandable and coherent big picture overview of Epicurean philosophy and then get back to the original task: living life as happily as possible. That means spending as much time as possible with friends who also share the same perspective, and (given the nature of things) that in itself means that we have to train ourselves like Lucretius to be able to present the big picture in a persuasive way without being sidetracked by our philosophic enemies.

In fact, it is tempting to trace the decline and fall of the Epicurean period to the time of Cicero and his elevation of these word-game arguments to the heart of the discussion. Very little confident forward-thinking successful Epicurean writing has emerged in the 2000 years since this the time of Lucretius and the philosophy got hijacked into this sidetrack of a discussion. Most of the ink spilled on this topic has been an absolute waste - which again I think was Cicero's intention, picked up by many others along the way.

Post by "Cassius" of September 13, 2022 at 8:04 PM

[Joshua](#) there were lots of good but short statements in these last two episodes and one that comes to mind is your "Epicurus in Romeo and Juliet" comment.

We need at least one thread on that - maybe "Epicurus in Shakespeare" but maybe several by particular play. Please think about that - we may have some already but I don't think it is organized.

Post by "Don" of September 13, 2022 at 10:55 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I haven't reviewed Wenham's paper but my kinetic / katastematic opinion is that kinetic pleasures are predicated on external forces acting upon us, katastematic pleasures arise from within ourselves (within our own minds). I'll need to substantiate that with texts, but that's my starting point.

I would point back to this post of mine:

Post

[RE: Do Pigs Value Katastematic Pleasure? \(Summer 2022 K / K Discussion\)](#)

This got longer as I continued to review this thread. This is enough for now! These are consolidated ancient and modern sources and some notes from my posts within this thread:

Notes:

Idea (revised): Biological homeostasis = aponia (freedom from pain in the body; everything is working as it should).

Pathe "what is done or happens to a person or thing, opposite: πράξις (praxis)" Praxis is the concrete aspect of pragma (genitive: prāgmata).

On perceived errors in Wikipedia: We can all be Wikipedia...



Don

July 17, 2022 at 10:31 PM

Post by "Don" of September 13, 2022 at 11:51 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2655-episode-one-hundred-thirty-nine-the-letter-to-menoceus-06-pleasure-part-two/>

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The reason for the question is to harl back to the debate on "katastematic pleasure", which may may not be related to tranquility, and to ask whether indeed either or both of those terms is in fact a "sensual pleasure" at all. (This question is the theme of the Wentham essay in our files section.)

There is a question as to whether it is indeed "sensual pleasure" which establishes how Epicurus recognizes the good, and whether "absence of pain" describes an identifiable sensual pleasure itself, or whether it describes instead a condition in which other / sensual pleasures are experienced without any mixture of pain or disruption.

Thanks for that clarification, and *mea culpa* for not addressing your response earlier!

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the debate on "katastematic pleasure", which may may not be related to tranquility

To that, I would say there doesn't seem to be much a debate to me. "Tranquility" = ataraxia = katastematic pleasure. Tranquility is usual/often translation of "ataraxia" which is specifically listed as a katastematic pleasure.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

to ask whether indeed either or both of those terms is in fact a "sensual pleasure" at all

I'll admit I haven't read Wenham yet, but to your specific question there, I'd have to point back to:

"[Death is nothing to us](#), for that which is dissolved into its elements is without consciousness / sensations / perception, and that which is without consciousness / sensations / perception is nothing to us."

Above being a statement of why to be free from the fear of death, I think PD2 is also a retort to the Cyrenaics: "Pleasure and pain are both 'movements,' according to the Cyrenaics: pleasure a smooth motion, and pain a rough motion. The absence of either type of motion is an intermediate state which is neither pleasurable nor painful. This is directed against Epicurus' theory that the homeostatic state of being free of pain, need and worry is itself most pleasant. The Cyrenaics make fun of the Epicurean theory by saying that this state of being free of desires and pain is the condition of a corpse." ([Source](#)) (NOTE: The commentator here says "this state of being free of desires and pain" but I don't believe Epicurus said a "state of being free from desire" but free from disturbance. They're NOT the same thing.)

Once Epicurus posited that there was no "neutral state," he had to basically say that any pleasure MUST be "sensual" in the sense (no pun intended) that it is sensed, it is perceived, that we are conscious of it. I don't think there can be such a thing as a *non-sensual* pleasure. It's an oxymoron. What would that even mean? Even if it is a pleasant memory, we *feel* the pleasure of the memory.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

There is a question as to whether it is indeed "sensual pleasure" which establishes how Epicurus recognizes the good, and whether "absence of pain" describes an identifiable sensual pleasure itself, or whether it describes instead a condition in which other / sensual pleasures are experienced without any mixture of pain or disruption.

Again, I think that "absence of pain" is something that is sensed but it doesn't arise from outside influences or causes. It is something felt "from inside." Felt. Sensed. Aponia "No pain" is a "state" or "condition" in which one feels untroubled in the body. Aponia and ataraxia are "things" felt in and of themselves, as much as joy (khara) and mirth/ good cheer (euphrosyne).

Post by "Don" of September 14, 2022 at 7:19 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Again, I think that "absence of pain" is something that is sensed but it doesn't arise from outside influences or causes. It is something felt "from inside." Felt. Sensed. Aponia "No pain" is a "state" or "condition" in which one feels untroubled in the body. Aponia and ataraxia are "things" felt in and of themselves, as much as joy (khara) and mirth/ good cheer (euphrosyne).

Revising and extending my remarks:

I implied in that quote that aponia = "absence of pain." I don't think that's right. Aponia and ataraxia are katastematic pleasures, just as khara and euphrosyne are kinetic pleasures. Hence, in my remarks above, they are all four sensed, perceived, etc.

The actual description of "absence of pain" is usually spelled out in full, and it's not always that phrase in the original:

Fragment 422. We need pleasure when in pain because of its absence; but when we are not experiencing such pain, and are perceiving stably, then there is no need for pleasure. For it is

not the needs of nature which, from outside us, create harm, but desire driven by groundless opinions.

Fragment 423. What brings unsurpassed joy is the removal of a great evil (μέγα κακόν mega kakon "great evil; ie, pain"); and this is the nature of the good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about chattering emptyly.

Fragment 445. We must not blame the body for the greatest evils nor attribute our troubles to mere circumstance. Instead we seek their cause within the soul (psykhē "mind, soul, psyche"): for by giving up every trifling and fleeting desire we give birth to a confidence perfect in itself.

I think I've looked at "every trifling and fleeting desire" recently in another thread, but the importance here is that "we seek their cause within the mind/soul." That fragment to me seems to say that the greatest pains/evils are generated from within the mind, and, to me, that implies that we also have access to the greatest pleasures from within our minds (as Metrodorus and Epicurus say in their texts).

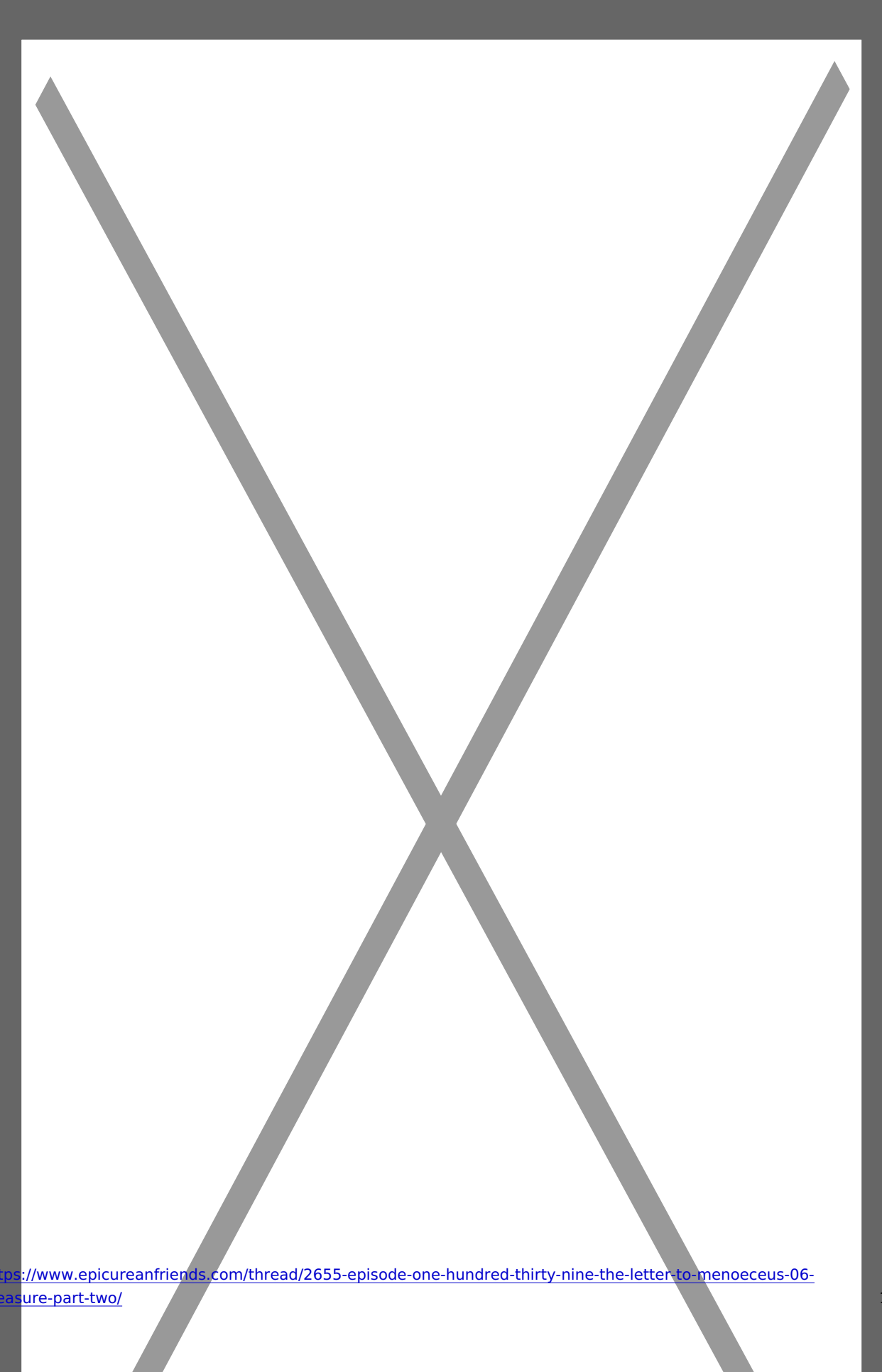
I think the sensation /recognition and enjoyment of the "absence of pain" is itself ataraxia and aponia. The sensation of being in the condition or state of absence of pain in the body and freedom from disturbance in the mind is aponia and ataraxia. Just as engagement in a physical activity brings joy (khara) and mirth (euphrosyne).

Post by "Don" of September 14, 2022 at 7:54 AM

One more thought then I'll step off the soapbox:

I was just listening to a podcast (specific one doesn't matter), and they were talking about flow:

Image not found or type unknown



[Flow \(psychology\) - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

I think there might be parallels or similarities or other connections between flow and katastematic pleasure, ie ataraxia/aponia. I'd be interested to read anything from anyone who knows more about Csíkszentmihályi's work in this area.

Post by “reneliza” of September 14, 2022 at 12:28 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If "freedom from pain" amounts to the highest sensual pleasure, would you expect that "freedom from pain" or "freedom from disturbance" could just as easily have been listed among these (taste / sex / sound / dance) that Epicurus chose to list? If so, why? If not, why not?

But I believe that this is important to think about because I believe that this could be at the source of something getting lost in translation. The goal isn't a kind of "boring existence" of neutral feeling in the body which doesn't have pain and therefore qualifies as a state of pleasantness. But the goal is maximizing the sweetest sensations of pleasure by seeing that we haven't yet reached the "purest" feeling of pleasure if we are also still feeling pain in the body (over-indulgences) or the mind (anxiety/fear).

I love this, and want to add (or really just, state explicitly) that this INCLUDES anxiety/fear that over-indulging in pleasures we're experiencing may cause pain down the line. At some point you have to trust your judgment and enjoy the moment, trusting that even if you have one drink more than you maybe should have, that the pain from your hangover will be short-lived, and WORTH it as long as you get sufficient pleasure in the moment.

If you spend all night worrying about how you'll feel if you accidentally have too much to eat or drink, or dance too long and leave your feet sore, then you're reducing your overall pleasure without reducing your overall pain.

[Quote from Don](#)

One more thought then I'll step off the soapbox:

I was just listening to a podcast (specific one doesn't matter), and they were talking about flow:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_%28p...%29?wprov=sfla1

I think there might be parallels or similarities or other connections between flow and katastematic pleasure, ie ataraxia/aponia. I'd be interested to read anything from anyone who knows more about Csíkszentmihályi's work in this area.

Oh gods no don't get me started on flow, because I have THEORIES

Seriously though, tying flow to katastematic pleasure (specifically, emotional regulation and thereby ataraxia/mental non-disturbance) is a really interesting concept I was thinking about yesterday (in slightly different wording) and will probably make it into an upcoming episode of my podcast

Post by “reneliza” of September 14, 2022 at 12:32 PM

Also, y'all, great work here. I'm gonna just go hide in a hole because there's no reason for me to say anything. I hadn't listened the to last episode before getting sucked into the convo on the forum, but having listened now, it can be assumed that I just agree with everything Joshua said in that one haha

Post by “Don” of September 14, 2022 at 1:22 PM

[Quote from reneliza](#)

Oh gods no don't get me started on flow, because I have THEORIES

Seriously though, tying flow to katastematic pleasure (specifically, emotional regulation and thereby ataraxia/mental non-disturbance) is a really interesting concept I was thinking about yesterday (in slightly different wording)

Oh, you have to share now! 😊 Don't leave us hanging!

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2655-episode-one-hundred-thirty-nine-the-letter-to-menoceus-06-pleasure-part-two/>

Post by “Cassius” of September 14, 2022 at 1:38 PM

[Quote from reneliza](#)

make it into an upcoming episode of my

THIS is the part that I really want to know about! My _____? 😊

Post by “reneliza” of September 14, 2022 at 2:21 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from reneliza](#)

make it into an upcoming episode of my

THIS is the part that I really want to know about! My _____? 😊

Oh oops! My podcast haha (fixed above)

Post by “Cassius” of September 14, 2022 at 2:26 PM

Now see you have been holding back! Are we allowed to know more? 😊

Post by “Don” of September 14, 2022 at 7:20 PM

[Quote from reneliza](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

One more thought then I'll step off the soapbox:

I was just listening to a podcast (specific one doesn't matter), and they were talking about flow:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_%28p...%29?wprov=sfla1

I think there might be parallels or similarities or other connections between flow and katastematic pleasure, ie ataraxia/aponia. I'd be interested to read anything from anyone who knows more about Csíkszentmihályi's work in this area.

Oh gods no don't get me started on flow, because I have THEORIES

Seriously though, tying flow to katastematic pleasure (specifically, emotional regulation and thereby ataraxia/mental non-disturbance) is a really interesting concept I was thinking about yesterday (in slightly different wording) and will probably make it into an upcoming episode of my podcast

Display More

I'm curious if you're "for" the idea of flow being connected somehow to katastematic pleasure or "against" the idea 😊 I'm legitimately unsure from the way you worded that.

I also think there's some connection between mindfulness and ataraxia/aponia. [This excerpt from this article](#) makes me go "Hmmm?"...

Quote

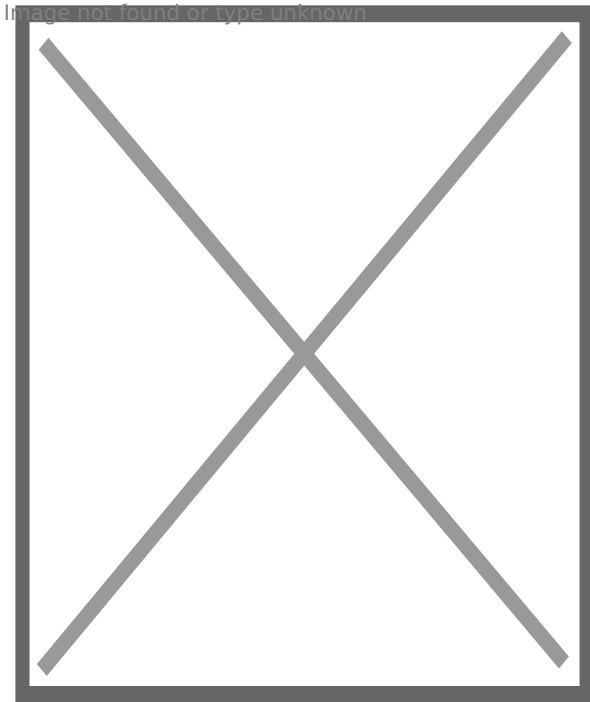
Mindfulness, the awareness that arises from paying attention to the present moment without resistance, is a fertile environment for flow to appear. However, being mindful does not guarantee flow, but rather creates the optimal conditions for flow to happen.

Mindfulness and flow both live “in the here and the now” and involve engaging the present moment with willingness. While flow happens during pleasant experiences, mindfulness can happen all of the time.

I do think ataraxia happens here and now, a calm abiding in the present moment. I'm especially intrigued by that "flow happens during pleasant experiences."

For those unfamiliar with flow, here's an article from Positive Psychology:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2655-episode-one-hundred-thirty-nine-the-letter-to-menoecus-06-pleasure-part-two/>



[8 Traits of Flow According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#)

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes 'Flow' as a state of complete absorption.
positivepsychology.com

Oh, and I have no dog in this flow fight. Consider these my musings on a possible interesting connection.

Post by “reneliza” of September 14, 2022 at 8:08 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from reneliza](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

One more thought then I'll step off the soapbox:

I was just listening to a podcast (specific one doesn't matter), and they were talking about flow:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_%28p...%29?wprov=sfla1

I think there might be parallels or similarities or other connections between flow and katastematic pleasure, ie ataraxia/aponia. I'd be interested to read anything from anyone who knows more about Csíkszentmihályi's work in this area.

Oh gods no don't get me started on flow, because I have THEORIES

Seriously though, tying flow to katastematic pleasure (specifically, emotional regulation and thereby ataraxia/mental non-disturbance) is a really interesting concept I was thinking about yesterday (in slightly different wording) and will probably make it into an upcoming episode of my podcast

Display More

I'm curious if you're "for" the idea of flow being connected somehow to katastematic pleasure or "against" the idea 😊 I'm legitimately unsure from the way you worded that.

I also think there's some connection between mindfulness and ataraxia/aponia. [This excerpt from this article](#) makes me go "Hmmm?"...

Quote

Mindfulness, the awareness that arises from paying attention to the present moment without resistance, is a fertile environment for flow to appear. However, being mindful does not guarantee flow, but rather creates the optimal conditions for flow to happen.

Mindfulness and flow both live "in the here and the now" and involve engaging the present moment with willingness. While flow happens during pleasant experiences, mindfulness can happen all of the time.

I do think ataraxia happens here and now, a calm abiding in the present moment. I'm especially intrigued by that "flow happens during pleasant experiences."

For those unfamiliar with flow, here's an article from Positive Psychology:

<https://positivepsychology.com/mihaly-csikse...father-of-flow/>

Oh, and I have no dog in this flow fight. Consider these my musings on a possible interesting connection.

Display More

Oh, I'm definitely for it. I think that Csikszentmihalyi has made really great contributions, but that he's only scratched the surface and that flow isn't actually ONE state, but something that comes in different forms, and that tranquility and emotional resilience is one of the forms that is most often overlooked.

I focus a lot on neurodivergence (mostly adhd and autism) and the state of hyperfocus is often compared and contrasted with the flow state. I see them as highly related, but not identical processes. Sometimes I find myself in a highly constructive flow state, making progress, reaching goals, etc... But sometimes I find myself staring at a graphic for four hours, switching between color palettes and moving text over pixel by pixel, becoming increasingly frustrated. And when I'm in the middle of it, I can't tell which one is which. It's only after the fact that I realize I wasted four hours on a graphic I decide not to even use.

I do also have some problems with the way flow is approached in productivity advice (essentially, quadruple your productivity by tying yourself so tightly to your work that you can't even tell where you end and it begins AT ALL TIMES) instead of seeing it as one tool which has a place, but can't be relied on for everything and can't be maintained over a 40 hour work week even if you COULD always reach it because it will burn you out so fast if approached like that. Ideas like a 10 hour work week are great, but somehow we always turn it into "yes that, but all the time" not understanding that the high ratio of rest to work is the only thing that can make concentrated productivity viable.

ADHDers especially get the "you accomplished all this in an hour - imagine if you applied yourself consistently" but although hyperfocus will lead to burnout even quicker, the flow state isn't sustainable in that way either.

But that's not a complaint against flow, really, just against the way we often use these findings against ourselves and others.