

Competing Greek Words for Pleasure in the Epicurean Corpus?

Post by “Pacatus” of October 31, 2023 at 1:00 PM

Calling [Don](#) (Our linguistic El Greco!) 😊

The following is a quote from the Wikipedia article on Hedone:

“In the philosophy of Epicurus, *hēdonē* is described as a pleasure that may or may not derive from actions that are virtuous, whereas another form of pleasure, *terpsis*, is always virtuous. Another Epicurean reading, **which distinguished *hēdonē* from *terpsis***, referred to it as a feeling of pleasure that is episodic and might or might not be beneficial. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Epicurus uses *hēdonē* in reference to only physical pleasures.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedone>

Wiktionary has *terpsis* (τέρψις) as “full enjoyment, delight, gladness, pleasure” from a proto-Indo-European term meaning “fulfillment, satisfaction.” https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CF%84%CE...2#Ancient_Greek

In the cited Stanford Encyclopedia, there is no reference to *terpsis*, rather to *khara* (χάρᾱ) – joy or exultation: “**There are also positive states of mind, which Epicurus identifies by the special term *khara* (joy), as opposed to *hēdonē* (pleasure, i.e., physical pleasure).**” [There follows a commentary on kinetic versus katasematic pleasures, the latter being (according to the author) associated with the pleasure of well-being (*eudaimonia*) as such.] <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epicurus/#PsycEthi>

Are there sources in the Greek, among the Epicurean corpus, for **τέρψις** and/or **χάρᾱ**? And a distinction from ἡδονή?

(If this has already been the subject of previous threads, just send me there. On a very cursory skim of some other threads on pleasure, I didn't see anything. 😞)

Post by “Joshua” of October 31, 2023 at 2:10 PM

Epicurus' common greeting in his letters uses the the phrase Ἐπίκουρος Μενοικεῖ χαίρειν-- "Epicurus to Menoikeus, joyful greetings".

χαίρειν is closely related to χἄρᾱ mentioned above.

Post by “Don” of October 31, 2023 at 2:10 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

Are there sources in the Greek, among the Epicurean corpus, for τέρψις and/or χἄρᾱ?
And a distinction from ἠδονή?

Quick response: χαρά is specifically one of the "kinetic" pleasures. I'll have to dig around about τέρψις. That's a new one to me.

Post by “Joshua” of October 31, 2023 at 2:17 PM

Cicero is just willfully obtuse on this point, as we've been discovering. Pleasure refers to a wider range of feelings than he is willing to acknowledge. Even Socrates in [Philebus](#) is prepared to recognize that Aphrodite, though having one name, signifies a number different *varieties* of pleasure.

Post by “Don” of October 31, 2023 at 2:34 PM

There's no use of τέρψις in Diogenes Laertius book 10.

Maybe in Philodemus? But he's not readily searchable.

Post by “Don” of October 31, 2023 at 2:36 PM

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

No Epicurean citations there.

Post by “Pacatus” of October 31, 2023 at 3:06 PM

The Wikipedia article gives this as the source for **terpsis**: Warren, James (2002). *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University. Warren is also the editor for *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*. I'm going through some of his articles on academia.edu -- but that will take awhile.

Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2023 at 3:07 PM

Here's from that Stanford / Konstan article. Possibly all or possibly only part of it is accurate, and no doubt digging in to the details will be helpful, especially if we could prepare a "concordance" of every time one of these words appears.

But one thing I can say for sure - a strictly academic approach can easily make a normal person's eyes glaze over and lead to all sorts of doubt and uncertainty if not handled carefully. Almost like the letter to Menoecus as to religion being preferable to hard determinism, I could see some people saying "save me God from these incessant vocabulary drills!" 😊

Quote

The ability to reason or calculate (*logismos*) cannot be a function of images. It is the faculty that lets us infer by analogy from the visible world to the invisible, and also that with which we may recognize that not all pleasures are to be chosen at all times, since some immediate pleasures may lead to long-term pain or harm (*Letter to Menoecus* = *LM* 129). What is more, one must know something about the nature of pleasure in order to pursue it rationally, and likewise for pain. Epicurus, it appears, uses the terms pleasure and pain (*hêdonê*, *algêdôn*) strictly in reference to physical *pathê* or sensations, that is, those that are experienced via the non-rational soul that is distributed throughout the body. As for the rational part or mind, we have positive and negative experiences through it too. Most prominent among the negative mental states is fear, above all the fear of unreal dangers, such as death. Death, Epicurus insists, is nothing to us, since while we exist, our death is not, and when our death occurs, we do not exist (*LM* 124–25); but if one is frightened by the empty name of death, the fear will

persist since we must all eventually die. This fear is one source of perturbation (*tarakhé*), and is a worse curse than physical pain itself; the absence of such fear is ataraxy, lack of perturbation, and ataraxy, together with freedom from physical pain, is one way of specifying the goal of life, for Epicurus.

There are also positive states of mind, which Epicurus identifies by the special term *khara* (joy), as opposed to *hêdonê* (pleasure, i.e., physical pleasure). These states too depend on belief, whether true or false. But Epicurus does not treat *khara* as an end, or part of the end for living: rather, he tends to describe the goal by negation, as freedom from bodily pain and mental disturbance (*LM* 128). However, happiness (*eudaimonia*), according to Epicurus, is not simply a neutral or privative condition but rather a form of pleasure in its own right — what Epicurus called *catastematic* or (following Cicero's Latin translation) "static" as opposed to "kinetic" pleasure. Although the precise nature of this distinction is debated, kinetic pleasures seem to be of the non-necessary kind (see below), such as those resulting from agreeable odors or sounds, rather than deriving from replenishment, as in the case of hunger or thirst. The philosophical school known as the Cyrenaics advocated increasing desires and seeking ever new ways of gratifying them.

Epicurus objected that such pleasures are necessarily accompanied by distress, for they depend upon a lack that is painful (Plato had demonstrated the problematic nature of this kind of pleasure; see *Gorgias* 496C–497A, [Philebus](#) 31E–32D, 46A–50C). In addition, augmenting desires tends to intensify rather than reduce the mental agitation (a distressful state of mind) that Epicurean philosophy sought to eliminate. *Catastematic* pleasure, on the contrary, is (or is taken in) a state rather than a process: it is the pleasure that accompanies well-being as such. The Cyrenaics and others, such as Cicero, maintained, in turn, that this condition is not pleasurable but rather neutral — neither pleasurable nor painful.

Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2023 at 3:15 PM

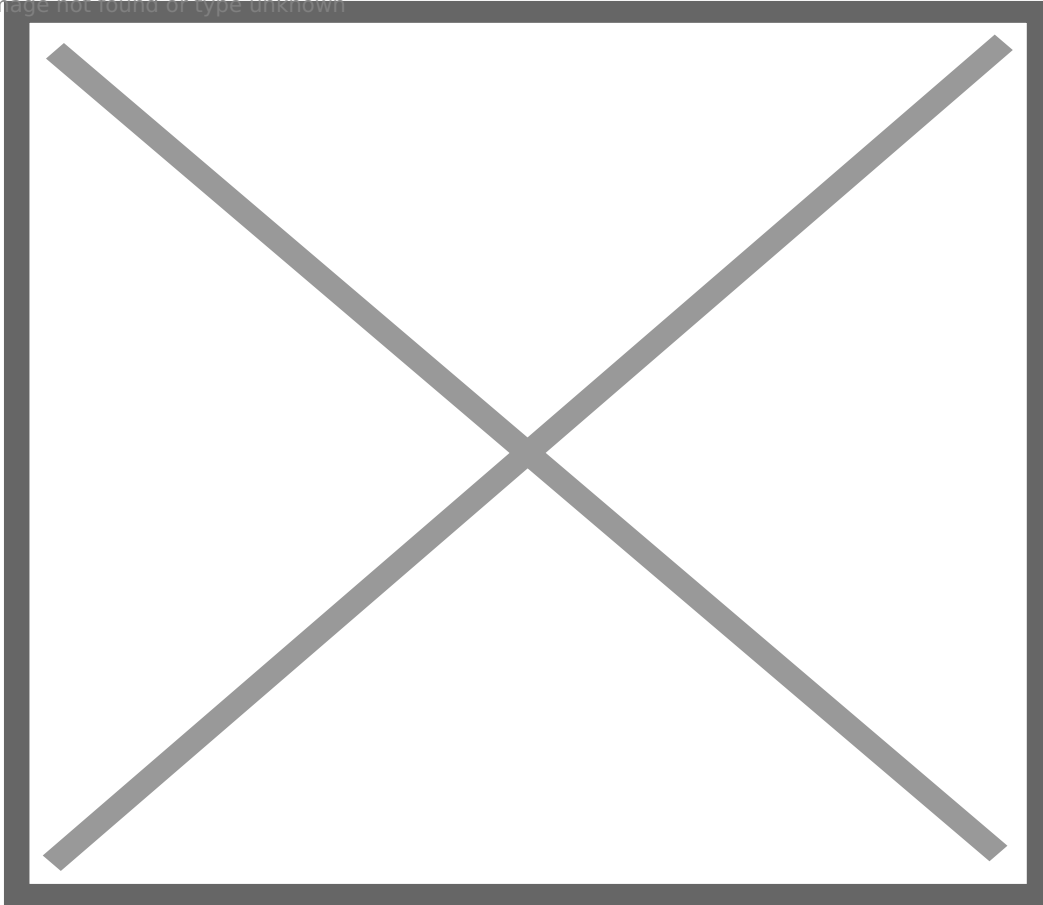
I don't think we've previously done this (I know I haven't myself) but some of Don's posts have come very close to being a "concordance" of where words denoting pleasure are found.

If we can pull that together somewhere that would be well worth the effort. At the very least we ought to find out where this has been posted before and post the links here, and then we can turn that into a reference page as we have time.

Post by "Cassius" of October 31, 2023 at 7:28 PM

Right now we have most of our "special resources" stored under this link:

Image not found or type unknown



[- Epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)

www.epicureanfriends.com

If we end up creating a "concordance" of uses of words that are a variation of "pleasure," we definitely need to add it there.

Post by "Don" of October 31, 2023 at 11:54 PM

I would differ with the title of this thread: "*Competing* Greek Words for Pleasure in the Epicurean Corpus?"

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3466-competing-greek-words-for-pleasure-in-the-epicurean-corpus/>

I would suggest any terms are more like "Complementary Greek Words" or even "Supplementary" or maybe even "Greek Words for Varieties of Pleasure".. in the Epicurean Corpus.

Post by "Don" of November 1, 2023 at 12:20 AM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

the source for terpsis: Warren, James (2002). Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University.

This review may be of help to is:

[Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia – Bryn Mawr Classical Review](#)

Quote

The rest of chapter 2 is an analysis of the longest surviving fragment of Democritus, B191. It begins, " Euthymia arises in men through a moderation of joy and a good balance of life." This confirms, says Warren, "that Democritus is no full-blooded hedonist," since it advises that we pursue, not "the maximum amount of pleasure," but only "a moderate amount of terpsis" And what is terpsis ? Warren translates it "joy," and distinguishes it from "pleasure" (hêdonê) as follows: whereas a feeling of pleasure "might or might not be beneficial," terpsis" is a feeling we can accept as objectively good." I find this implausible and would urge instead that Democritus' distinction between terpsis and hêdonê anticipates Epicurus' distinction between "joy" (chara) and "pleasure": joy is the mental state that has pleasure as its intentional object. (On this, see my article "Epicurus on the telos", Phronesis 38 [1993] 281-321.) Warren cites B4: "Joy (terpsis) and lack of joy are boundary-markers of what is and is not beneficial." But Democritus is not saying here that joy is the feeling of pleasure that we get from what, being truly beneficial, is objectively good. He is saying that what is good (i.e., beneficial) must be measured in terms of what causes joy. And that sounds to me a lot like the moderate hedonism of Epicurus.

So, it appears Democritus uses terpsis, not Epicurus.

Post by "Pacatus" of November 1, 2023 at 1:19 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

So, it appears Democritus uses terpsis, not Epicurus.

By Ἡδονή! I think you've got it! 👍

(And I agree with your better wording for the thread title. 😊)