

Discussion on Ataraxia: freedom from anxiety....What is it?...How can we attain it in a world mad with chaos and conflict?

Post by “Raphael Raul” of December 1, 2023 at 11:14 AM

Discussion on Ataraxia: freedom from anxiety.

...What is it?...How can we attain it in a world mad with chaos and conflict?

In a society filled with a barrage of messages through all sorts of media communicating all the world's strife,

conflicts and wars, how can we let go of this relentless confusion and find peace of mind and tranquility?

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 2, 2023 at 8:01 AM

[Quote from Raphael Raul](#)

In a society filled with a barrage of messages through all sorts of media communicating all the world's strife,

conflicts and wars, how can we let go of this relentless confusion and find peace of mind and tranquility?

First, we must realize that war has existed all through history, so we aren't in some kind of unique time. And in many countries we actually have more peace now than ever before.

In Epicurus' time: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:...lenistic_period

To calm our anxieties, we study the elements of Epicurean philosophy. We accustom ourselves to not fear death, because death is an inevitability for each one of us. For some it may come sooner than for others. And while we are alive we learn to live the best and most enjoyable and pleasant life as possible by considering what is necessary both for the health of the body and the happiness of the soul. We practice moving toward actions and activities that bring happiness and bliss, and these "crowd out" the unnecessary anxieties which earlier arose from the incorrect understanding of the nature of things (as well as the anxieties which arose from

incorrect perspectives on reality).

Post by “Don” of December 2, 2023 at 7:17 PM

I agree with [Kalosyni](#) 's post.

I would emphasize that ataraxia is not dependent on external circumstances. It is a stable state of mind that arises from getting rid of false anxiety-producing ideas about death, divine retribution, fate, and so on. The stable peace of mind that results will then be the default position from which one experiences the world.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 2, 2023 at 7:28 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I would emphasize that ataraxia is not dependent on external circumstances.

I would venture to say that ataraxia depends upon safety and security. Resilience is something different which would be the ability to cope during high stress.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 2, 2023 at 8:39 PM

These [Principal Doctrines](#) touch on resilience:

[PD39](#): The person who has put together the best means for confidence about external threats is one who has become familiar with what is possible and at least not unfamiliar with what is not possible, but who has not mixed with things where even this could not be managed and who has driven away anything that is not advantageous.

[PD40](#): All those who have the power to obtain the greatest confidence from their neighbors also live with each other most enjoyably in the most steadfast trust; and experiencing the strongest fellowship they do not lament as pitiful the untimely end of those who pass away.

Post by “Don” of December 3, 2023 at 12:22 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

I would emphasize that ataraxia is not dependent on external circumstances.

I would venture to say that ataraxia depends upon safety and security. Resilience is something different which would be the ability to cope during high stress.

I agree that resilience and ataraxia are different things, but I don't see ataraxia being dependent on external circumstances. Ataraxia is the stable pleasure achieved when the fears and anxieties have been rooted out. For example:

In the *Letter to Herodotus* (10.82):

mental tranquillity (ataraxia) means being released from all these troubles and cherishing a continual remembrance of the highest and most important truths.

In the *Letter to Menoikeus* (10.128):

The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection for the health of the body and for the tranquility (ataraxia) of the mind, that is for our physical and our mental existence, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For the sake of this, we do everything in order to neither be in bodily or mental pain nor to be in fear or dread; and so, when once this has come into being around us, it sets free all of the calamity, distress, and suffering of the mind...

In the *Letter to Pythocles*:

[85] In the first place, remember that, like everything else, knowledge of celestial phenomena, whether taken along with other things or in isolation, has no other end in view than peace of mind (ataraxia) and firm conviction (confidence, assurance, guarantee, trust < [πίστις](#)).

[96] For in all the celestial phenomena such a line of research is not to be abandoned ; for, if you fight against clear evidence, you never can enjoy genuine peace of mind (ataraxia).

The characteristic of the sage that "Additionally, once the sage has become wise, they will no longer fall back into ignorance." (Hicks: Moreover, he who has once become wise never more assumes the opposite habit, not even in semblance, if he can help it.)

From my reading, all of these point to ataraxia being the result of rooting out incorrect beliefs and the fears and anxieties that arise from them. Once those are abandoned, they don't grow back, regardless of external circumstances. I believe Epicurus could still experience ataraxia even in his last days precisely because it doesn't rely on external circumstances.

I agree that resilience - what I would interpret as self-reliance - is a part of Epicurean philosophy, but I think it's different than ataraxia. Ataraxia is the stable state of the mind once the anxiety, fears, and disturbances have been eradicated, rooted out, and abandoned. That is precisely what gives it its stability.

Post by “Martin” of December 3, 2023 at 1:39 AM

Ataraxia can be affected by circumstances if they are extreme . While I am on a zip-line, ataraxia as a goal is temporarily suspended to gain exceptional pleasure from the experience of nearly flying and the spectacular views. While I am on a plane in heavy turbulence, under immediate threat by a violent robber or in a combat situation, ataraxia is suspended until the danger has passed. The temporary disappearance or reduction of ataraxia under extreme circumstances is compatible with all quotes in Don's comment #6. A wise Epicurean will avoid getting into such circumstances most of the time but may not always be able to avoid them.

Post by “Don” of December 3, 2023 at 10:15 AM

I disagree.

My current understanding is that ataraxia is not merely the "calm" or "tranquility" we get from relaxing on a beach or floating in an inner tube down a river or even on a meditation cushion. Those pleasures feel good, but they're not ataraxia. I take it that kind of "calm" is what's being described by [Martin](#) and [Kalosyni](#) .

My understanding is that ataraxia has to be worked on, arises from study and reflection, but once you have rooted out those beliefs that cause anxieties, fear, dread and turbulence in the mind, they don't grow back. It becomes the background against which life is experienced. It's a stable state of the mind. That's what I'm getting from the texts. We can get glimpses of it as we study, reflect, and internalize "how things are" but it's not easy to throw the baggage of cultural indoctrination overboard. It doesn't happen all at once like some kind of epiphany or Buddhist satori or bestowed by the grace of some heavenly being. It takes human work and

effort. But it's worth it in the long run to face the world with an assured, solid, stable mind.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 3, 2023 at 7:53 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

My understanding is that ataraxia has to be worked on, arises from study and reflection, but once you have rooted out those beliefs that cause anxieties, fear, dread and turbulence in the mind, they don't grow back.

Epicurus instructs how to remove the false beliefs regarding the fear of gods and the fear of death.

This post has more references:

Post

[RE: The Meaning of the Greek Word "Ataraxia"](#)

[From a prior post by Don:](#)

[Feb 19th 2023](#)

[#2](#)

ΑΤΑΡΑΞΙΑ (Ataraxia and related terms: Note that αταραξια is literally "ataraksia" even though the usual English spelling is "ataraxia." Therefore, words that have atarak- are directly related.

From ἀ- (a-, “not”) + ταραάσσω (tarássō, “trouble, disturb”) + -ῖα (-íā); Antonyms: ταραχή (tarakhé)

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἀτα^ρ-αξία](#)

[PD17](#) One who acts aright is utterly steady and serene, whereas one who goes astray is full of...



Cassius

December 3, 2023 at 7:13 PM

Post by “Martin” of December 4, 2023 at 4:59 AM

Quote

I take it that kind of "calm" is what's being described by [Martin](#) ...

No.

Quote

My understanding is that ataraxia has to be worked on, arises from study and reflection, ...

Agreed.

Quote

..., but once you have rooted out those beliefs that cause anxieties, fear, dread and turbulence in the mind, they don't grow back.

This is the case while we are fully conscious with properly functioning mind. However, while we are asleep and therefore our ability to use logic is turned off, they can temporarily come back. In earlier years, I made the following observations: Sometimes while in deep sleep, I experienced extreme fear which took a minute or more to disappear when suddenly waking up from deep sleep, without that I could even tell what caused the fear because deep sleep appears to be dreamless. By contrast, when suddenly waking up from a bad dream, the fear experienced during the dream went away almost instantly.

The way Epicurus states that the wise man does not become unwise allows for a temporary lack of wisdom: "..., he who has once become wise never more assumes the opposite habit, ...".

Being wise includes logic. When awake but extremely tired, our ability to use logic is turned off. In that state, I sometimes acted unwisely by e.g. overwriting or deleting a file which I wanted to keep or save, turning off the computer the wrong way, closing a book without moving the bookmark to the new position, misplacing objects.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 4, 2023 at 8:54 AM

This thread reminds me that we need a list of Epicurean "remedies" for anxiety and fear. (I may have started that already somewhere 🤔). And then we need corresponding sections of text to accompany each.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 4, 2023 at 9:01 AM

And when I think of remedies such as "accustom yourself to see that [death is nothing to us](#)" ...this is a deep and long practice, that takes time. And you will obviously still feel your autonomic reflexes kick in to prevent you from being run over by a bus. So this remedy is instead for the quiet anxiety that may arise in the middle of night as you ponder your mortality. And also we may feel we have conquered our fear, only to discover that when faced with an incurable disease that we may have to "start over" in a sense with the process, and deal with mortality given the new information. This is just our humanness (since we aren't gods 😊).

Post by “Cassius” of December 4, 2023 at 9:23 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

..this is a deep and long practice, that takes time

The kind of thing to have a list to remind yourself daily to think about.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 4, 2023 at 10:26 AM

I started this list, but haven't yet added the text references:

Thread

[List of Epicurean philosophical remedies](#)

List of human life issues for which there are Epicurean philosophical remedies (there are specific [Principal Doctrines](#) and Vatican Sayings (etc) which address these issues).

There are Epicurean remedies for the following:

--anxiety that arises when realizing we are mortal and will one day die.

--anxiety that arises when we notice a drive to preserve our life for as long as possible.

--anxiety and fear that arises when we are sick and experience pain in the body (understanding the nature of pain)....



Kalosyni

November 8, 2023 at 10:52 AM

Post by “Godfrey” of December 4, 2023 at 3:43 PM

[Quote from Martin](#)

Sometimes while in deep sleep, I experienced extreme fear which took a minute or more to disappear when suddenly waking up from deep sleep, without that I could even tell what caused the fear because deep sleep appears to be dreamless.

That sounds like it may have been sleep apnea.

Post by “Don” of December 4, 2023 at 3:44 PM

Thanks, [Martin](#) , for that clarification. You make some thought-provoking points.

Your post made me think of this from my musings about the characteristics:

[Epicurean Sage - The same person whether awake or asleep](#)

Hicks: and he will be like himself even when asleep. Yonge: he will be the same man asleep and awake; Mensch: He will be himself even when asleep. Mensch notes...
sites.google.com

Post by “Martin” of December 5, 2023 at 3:29 AM

Quote

That sounds like it may have been sleep apnea.

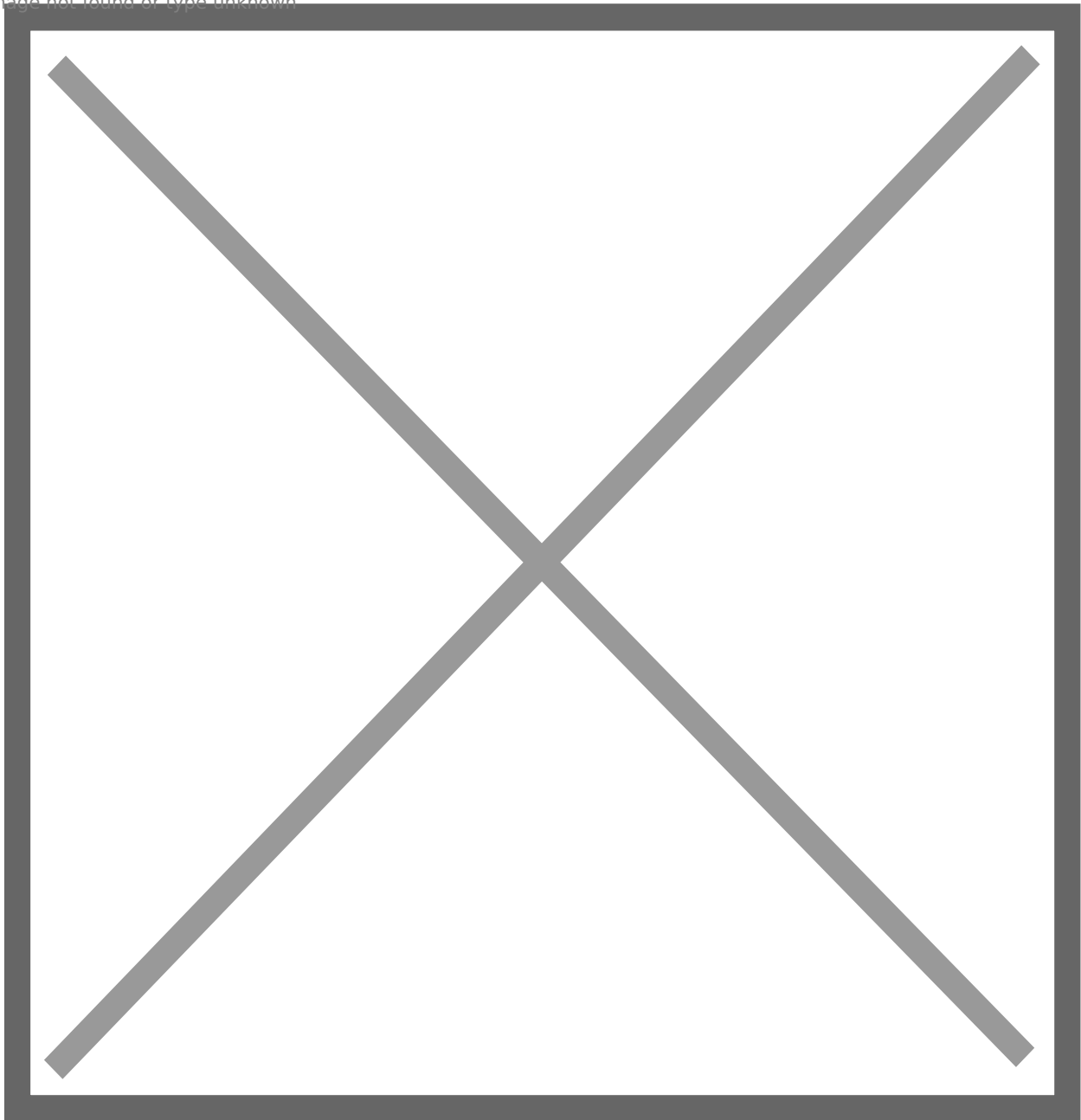
It was not sleep apnea because I did not have lack of oxygen. Usually, I woke up because of the alarm clock or other noise. Deep sleep occurs early in a sleep cycle, not towards the end, such that we do not become aware of how much our subconsciousness may go wild during deep sleep if sleep is not interrupted early in its cycle.

Post by “kochiekoch” of December 5, 2023 at 8:04 PM

Martin,

I wonder if you occasionally experience night terrors? I have in the past and my experience sounds similar to yours, even though, now that I think about it, I haven't for a long time.

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[What is a Night Terror? - Sleep Doctor](#)

Confused about the difference between night terrors and nightmares? Learn how they differ, as well as more information about these parasomnias.

sleepdoctor.com

Post by “Don” of December 5, 2023 at 8:06 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3559-discussion-on-ataraxia-freedom-from-anxiety-what-is-it-how-can-we-attain-it-in-a/>

I think we're trying to diagnose [Martin](#) from a distance everyone. I think he's okay.

Post by “kochiekoch” of December 5, 2023 at 8:17 PM

LOL!!! I think he's OK too. Night terrors are pretty common stuff. 😊

Post by “Martin” of December 6, 2023 at 12:17 AM

Night terror fits what I experienced. At that time, I was about 31 years old and was living alone, so I might not even have remembered those cases when I woke up from a night terror itself as described by Dr. Breus.

Around that time, I had a sleep disorder which made me wake up after just a few hours of sleep, and I could fall asleep again only in the morning, such that the alarm clock or the rising external noise level in Tokyo woke me up during night terrors and made me remember them. Alternative events after the alarm were sleep paralysis and out-of-body experiences. Sleep disorder, night terrors, sleep paralysis and out-of-body experiences disappeared within a year. I guess reading a book and mental drills with a card-index instead of just waiting for the second sleep helped me to fall asleep again faster and thereby cured the sleep disorder. When I was 46 years old, I developed a similar sleep disorder again but without night terrors, sleep paralysis or out-of-body experiences. This time, reading or studying is again helpful to fall asleep again but total sleep at nighttime is down. Since retirement, I mitigate the sleep deprivation by additional sleep after breakfast or lunch as needed.

Post by “andkankan” of February 22, 2024 at 9:34 AM

Finding Ataraxia in today's chaos is tough, right? I've found some solace through personal practices like mindfulness and, surprisingly, exploring [medical cannabis](#) under proper guidance. It's about finding what works for you. For me, it's been a journey of trial and error, but the relief it brings is undeniable.

Post by “Cassius” of February 22, 2024 at 10:32 AM

[andkankan](#) -- Please respond to your Welcome message and tell us a little more about yourself. [epicureanfriends.com/thread/3720/](https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3720/)

Post by “DavidN” of February 22, 2024 at 6:17 PM

[Quote from Martin](#)

This is the case while we are fully conscious with properly functioning mind. However, while we are asleep and therefore our ability to use logic is turned off, they can temporarily come back.

Wait your waking and sleeping states are different. When I used to work drilling my sleep deprivation would get so bad I'd dream with my eyes open. I occasionally start to dream while I'm still half conscious as-well. And whenever my dreams become coherent and are more than just a random shuffling of sensations I'm generally fully aware that I'm dreaming, and can choose to wake or continue with the dream. When I was a child I literally killed all my nightmares, took alot of work to gain that much control over my dream state but now it's pretty easy. All it took was the suggestion from my father that I could control my dreams, and I was off to hunt my monsters. Sometimes I'll get annoyed with the irrational parts of my dreams and think to myself 'well that doesn't make any sense' and then go about editing out the nonsensical junk. Though generally I don't like to use that much energy when I'm suppose to be resting so I just go with the flow as long as it's tolerable.

Post by “DavidN” of February 22, 2024 at 6:29 PM

But to the actual topic I agree with the general direction of the thread, that with practice we should gain some control over our own emotional state, but that extreme circumstances can and do disrupt this. However I would suggest that if you find yourself anxious about the state of the world, that unless the chaos has reached your doorstep, you take Epicurus advice and stop doom scrolling... I mean retreat from the clamor of public life. I find 99% of news feeds to be Narratives devoid of facts anyways. I generally have to be really interested in a topic if I'm going to dig around and find enough facts to piece together a coherent picture.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3559-discussion-on-ataraxia-freedom-from-anxiety-what-is-it-how-can-we-attain-it-in-a/>