

A List of Pleasures Specifically Endorsed By Epicurus

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This list might grow so large as to be useless, or it might turn out to be helpful to have a list of specific references which attest to Epicurus giving examples of pleasures that he himself endorsed. I'll start a list based on section XIX and XX of Part 3 of Tusculan Disputations. Of course even these specific endorsements are contextual, in that at times we will choose the bad over the good when the choice leads to greater pleasure when all consequences are considered. But we so often speak of pleasure just in the generic sense, or as abstract labels such as absence of pain, that it might be helpful to have a list for finding description of specific activities. I'll include here references to Lucretius or Diogenes of Oinoanda, and maybe Philodemus, but the purpose here is not to list all possible pleasures but to accumulate references from the authoritative texts.

1. Taste
 1. Food and Drink (presumably) (TD3,19-20)
2. Hearing
 1. Music (TD3,19-20)
3. Sight
 1. "Abstracted from ideas raised by external objects visible to the eye." (TD3,19-20)
 2. "those forms which affect the eyes with pleasure" (TD3,19-20)
4. Touch
 1. Embraces (TD3,19-20)
 2. Sports (TD3,19-20)
5. Multiple Senses
 1. Agreeable Motions (TD3,19-20)
 2. "those other pleasures which are perceived by the whole man by means of any of his senses" (TD3,19-20)
6. Pleasures of the Mind
 1. "I have perceived men's minds to be pleased with the hopes of enjoying those things which I mentioned above, and with the idea that it should enjoy them without any interruption from pain." (TD3,19-20)
 2. Confidence of continued pleasure ("and with the idea that it should enjoy them without any interruption from pain" (TD3,19-20)
 3. "It is sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt."

Quote

II-XX.¶

... Why, Epicurus, do we use any evasions, and not allow in our own words the same feeling to be pleasure, which you are used to boast of with such assurance? Are these your words or not? This is what you say in that book which contains all the doctrine of your school; for I will perform, on this occasion, the office of a translator, lest any one should imagine that I am inventing anything. Thus you speak: "Nor can I form any notion of the chief good, abstracted from those pleasures which are perceived by taste, or from what depends on hearing music, or abstracted from ideas raised by external objects visible to the eye, or by agreeable motions, or from those other pleasures which are perceived by the whole man by means of any of his senses; nor can it possibly be said that the pleasures of the mind are excited only by what is good; for I have perceived men's minds to be pleased with the hopes of enjoying those things which I mentioned above, and with the idea that it should enjoy them without any interruption from pain." And these are his exact words, so that any one may understand what were the pleasures with which Epicurus was acquainted. Then he speaks thus, a little lower down: "I have often inquired of those who have been called wise men, what would be the remaining good if they should exclude from consideration all these pleasures, unless they meant to give us nothing but words? I could never learn anything from them; and unless they choose that all virtue and wisdom should vanish and come to nothing, they must say with me, that the only road to happiness lies through those pleasures which I mentioned above." What follows is much the same, and his whole book on the chief good everywhere abounds with the same opinions.

...

II-XX.¶

It may be said, What! do you imagine Epicurus really meant this, and that he maintained anything so sensual? Indeed I do not imagine so, for I am sensible that he has uttered many excellent things and sentiments, and delivered maxims of great weight. Therefore, as I said before, I am speaking of his acuteness, not of his morals. Though he should hold those pleasures in contempt, which he just now commended, yet I must remember wherein he places the chief good. For he was not contented with barely saying this, but he has explained what he meant: he says, that taste, and embraces, and sports, and music, and those forms which affect the eyes with pleasure, are the chief good. Have I invented this? have I misrepresented him?

Quote from Lucretius Book 2:1

It is sweet, when on the great sea the winds trouble its waters, to behold from land another's deep distress; not that it is a pleasure and delight that any should be afflicted, but because it is sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt. It is sweet also to look upon the mighty struggles of war arrayed along the plains without sharing yourself in the danger. But nothing is more welcome than to hold the lofty and serene positions well fortified by the learning of the wise, from which you may look down upon others and see them wandering all abroad and going astray in their search for the path of life, see the contest among them of intellect, the rivalry of birth, the striving night and day with surpassing effort to struggle up to the summit of power and be masters of the world.