

Another Article Insisting On The Importance of the Kinetic / Katestematic Distinction, Despite Citing Nikolsky

Post by "Godfrey" of July 9, 2022 at 6:41 PM

Liebersohn's article is a fascinating case study. His simple proposition is that katastematic pleasure is necessary, whereas kinetic pleasure is unnecessary.

However it quickly becomes evident that his thinking is grounded in Platonism and this defines his entire approach to arguing his proposition. I imagine that even conceiving of this proposition was determined by his evident Platonic background, but it's possible to examine his proposition from outside of Platonism, which of course is how I and most of us here would probably approach it.

Here are two ways that he states his proposition:

1) *"As the removal of pain is a necessary condition for Epicurean ataraxia and aponia, 'katastematic' pleasure, having to do with the removal of pain, is the necessary pleasure pertaining both to the process of removing pain and to its result... while 'kinetic' pleasure is an unnecessary pleasure having nothing to do with the removal of pain, e.g. it starts after pain has been removed."* [Now this sounds thoroughly Platonic, Ciceronian perhaps]

2) *"I propose to distinguish between 'moving towards an end', i.e. movement which has an end (the absence of pain) and 'moving qua moving', i.e. movement which has no end (it is concerned with its own movement)".* [If he had left out the parenthetical "absence of pain", I might find this an interesting topic for discussion. But I haven't given that much thought because that's not what he's arguing. It is, however, why I read his article.]

I'm not a scholar and don't want to disturb my ataraxia by making a counter argument to his article. I do want to point out that he's apparently done a great deal of research in preparing his article. He even quotes DeWitt: "as was rightly detected by N. DeWitt... [EAHP pp. 7-8]... Plato did not regard pleasure as the highest good since it is "becoming" rather than "being".... And a chunk of his article is devoted to discussing [Nikolsky](#). But his conclusions are for the most part diametrically opposed to what I think I would conclude from reviewing the same material that he reviewed. (The only footnote that I checked was one referencing Long and Sedley's *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. He seemed to be referencing from a different edition than the kindle version that I have, and I couldn't find his reference on the pages that he cited. However what I guessed he was referring to didn't say at all what he was suggesting, but I can't say that I was pointing to the same quote as he was.)

The way he approaches his proposition is steeped in absence of pain and, apparently, hierarchical pleasures. And he favorably mentions absence of pain as a neutral state. It pretty much made my head spin the way his conclusions seemed to differ from mine. When he points out a passage that I would read as supporting my interpretation of pleasure, he argues off in an entirely different direction. But I do find this article to be useful as a case study, although I've spent more than enough time with it now and leave that study to someone more academically minded than me.

There are two things he suggests, which I don't think that I've heard before. First is that the Principle Doctrines may include statements by later Epicureans as well, based on Bailey's Epicurus The Extent Remains pp. 344-7. This is counter to my understanding: has it ever been disputed or disproved, or is this accepted? I thought this was the case with the Vatican Sayings but not the Principle Doctrines.

Secondly, he gives a date for the Letter to Menoecus as c. 296-295 BC (J.E Hessler, *Proposte sulla data di composizione e il destinatario dell'Epistola a Meneceo*, <Cronache Ercolanesi>, XLI (2011) pp. 7-11). He also states that this letter "was intended to reach a wider public who might still be under the influence of an erroneous philosophy or of the unsupported maxims and opinions of popular thought [per Bailey ETER p. 327]... in the [LM] there appear colloquial terms such as 'necessary-unnecessary' (Menoec. 127), while technical terms such as 'kinetic' and 'katestematic' populate treatises such as [that referenced in Diogenes Laertius X 136], addressed to the devoted Epicurean." Liebersohn states elsewhere that Menoecus was a beginner in the philosophy; to my understanding there's no information regarding Menoecus; this must be inferred from the Bailey quote or perhaps some foreign language publication.

One last comment. To go out on a limb, I'm still not convinced that there are necessary and unnecessary pleasures. I'm convinced that there are necessary and unnecessary *desires*, but to me desires are quite different from pleasures. So for me, his proposition is invalid on these grounds although others here may disagree.