

## **Do Pigs Value Katastematic Pleasure? ( Summer 2022 K / K Discussion)**

**Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2022 at 8:18 PM**

This next section is directly relevant to what we have been discussing, and shows how DeWitt was on top of this issue and did not consider it a problem at all. He point out that Epicurus endorsed BOTH types of pleasure, and did not pursue one to the exclusion of the other. Instead of obsessing over the static/active issue like the modern commentators do, DeWitt never skips a beat: but simply incorporates the issue into the main body of the philosophy under "Pleasure" as the word is normally understood, and goes on down the road. This is well before Gosling & Taylor produced their analysis or [Nikolsky](#) produced his refinement. That's one of the reasons I continue to advocate that new people read this book first, even before they waded into Wikipedia or any of the other Cambridge or other "handbooks."

state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument,<sup>53</sup> but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

Even at the present day the same objection is raised. For instance, a modern Platonist, ill informed on the true intent of Epicurus, has this to say: "What, in a word, is to be said of a philosophy that begins by regarding pleasure as the only positive good and ends by emptying pleasure of all positive content?"<sup>54</sup> This ignores the fact that this was but one of the definitions of pleasure offered by Epicurus, that he recognized kinetic as well as static pleasures. It ignores also the fact that Epicurus took personal pleasure in public festivals and encouraged

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his disciples to attend them and that regular banquets were a part of the ritual of the sect. Neither does it take account of the fact that in the judgment of Epicurus those who feel the least need of luxury enjoy it most and that intervals of abstinence enhance the enjoyment of luxury.<sup>55</sup> Thus the Platonic objector puts upon himself the necessity of denying that the moderation of the rest of the year furnishes additional zest to the enjoyment of the Christmas dinner; he has failed to become aware of the Epicurean zeal for "condensing pleasure."

On a level with this criticism is the allegation of a more recent writer that Epicurus put himself in a corner by defining pleasure as freedom from pain.<sup>56</sup> It was not Epicurus who put himself in a corner but rather Aristippus and Plato, who by recognizing only peaks of pleasure separated by intervals either void of pleasure or neutral or mixed, rendered all continuity of pleasure impossible and consequently all continuity of happiness. The error of the modern critic is to allow ancient controversy to vitiate the independence of modern judgments. The ancient enemies of Epicureanism were not concerned to present a total estimate of its teachings; they pounced upon those doctrines which, when considered singly, seemed susceptible of refutation or ridicule. They kept

were absent from the Authorized Doctrines. Its presence is easily overlooked, because the context of the controversy has become blurred with the lapse of time, but the emphasis derived from prominence of position must have been at one time arresting. It forms part of the famous tetrapharmacon, Doctrine 3. The first part, already quoted, identifies the basic pleasure as freedom from pain, the only kind that could be continuous: "The removal of all pain is the limit of magnitude for pleasures." This rules out the "neutral state" as postulated by Plato; it identifies the neutral state as one of static pleasure. The second part of the Doctrine disposes of Plato's "mixed states": "And wherever the experience of pleasure is present, so long as it prevails, there is no pain or distress or a combination of them." This amounts to denying that pain and pleasure are capable of mixing and of resulting in a state that is different from either. Epicurus implies instead and elsewhere

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teaches that pain is subtractable from pleasure, leaving a balance of the latter.<sup>57</sup> This principle applies either to physical pain or mental distress or to both together. It is essential to the thesis that continuous pleasure is possible.

Those who denied that pleasure was the telos were naturally not concerned with the question of the continuity of pleasure, but there was an analogous question of equal consequence, whether the wise man could be happy under all circumstances. The importance of this revealed itself shortly after Plato's demise and showed no abatement for three centuries. In two passages Cicero lists the names of those who gave an affirmative answer – from which the name of Plato is conspicuously absent – and elsewhere he pretends to cite the opinion of Epicurus, misrepresenting him shamelessly and using his name as an excuse for parading a tedious collection of his own translations from Greek tragedy on the topic of pain.<sup>58</sup> What Epicurus is on record as saying is this: "Even if under torture the wise man is happy."<sup>59</sup> Cicero chose to imagine him in the brazen bull of the tyrant Phalaris, in which the victims were roasted alive, and as saying "How pleasant; how little this torture means to me!" This is a shabby invention and shameless

words, known even beyond his own sect, exhibit the triumph of happiness over pain: "On this blissful day of my life, which is likewise my last, I write these words to you all. The pains of my strangury and dysentery do not abate the excess of their characteristic severity and continue to keep me company, but over against all these I set the joy in my soul at the recollection of the disquisitions composed by you and the rest." <sup>60</sup> He is here exemplifying the subtraction of pain from pleasure, leaving a balance of pleasure, which is happiness. The letter is addressed to Idomeneus but is intended for the whole Lampsacene circle, which made many contributions to the literature of the school. It is the grateful recognition of this service, together with all that it implies, that in this instance is declared to outweigh the physical pains.

It was the discovery of static pleasure, without which continuity of pleasure was impossible, that resulted in the division of pleasures into

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static and kinetic. There was no call for such a division until the name of pleasure had been extended to denote the possession of health. On this point, however, as on many others, greater precision is possible. The modern use of the word *static* as opposed to *kinetic* is Aristotelian in origin. The Epicurean word is *katastematikos*, from *katastema*, explained in the lexicon as "stable condition." It connotes, moreover, change of state, from action to rest. To Epicurus it denotes a normal state of pleasure to which the individual returns after kinetic pleasure, which is activity. For example, it is the comfortable feeling that follows after the satisfaction of hunger and thirst, the relaxed condition that follows after attending the theater, a public festival or a banquet. Exceptionally, it describes the return to normal after the joy of escape from peril of life.

Since this innovation was, as it were, the keystone of the new hedonism, it is not surprising to learn that it was expounded in the letter addressed to the philosophers in Mytilene, which is rightly regarded as

innovation is made clear by a sound paragraph of Laertius.<sup>61</sup> Discussing the divergence from Cyrenaic doctrine he quotes a phrase of Metrodorus: "Pleasure being thought of both as associated with motion and as static." Epicurus is quoted at slightly greater length: "Serenity of mind and freedom from bodily pain are static pleasures, but joy and delight are seen to be associated with motion, that is, activity." In both these passages modern usage calls for the adjective *static*; the Greek would demand *catastematic*. *Static* and *kinetic* would apply to the state of a stone, now lying on the ground, now sent hurtling through the air. *Catastematic* and *kinetic* would apply to the pleasure of a healthy Epicurean, now enjoying a quiet evening at home, now having a rollicking time at one of the monthly banquets.

The fact that this extension of the name of pleasure was so long and malevolently contested is merely proof of the jealousy of rival schools and of the real validity in the arguments. The validity of the main contention, that continuity of happiness must be conceded to be feasible, was not contested. The leading philosophers after Plato seem to have made this concession, and much that Plato had said about pleasure became obsolete. Theophrastus was an exception, who, attaching great value to external goods and evils, declared "that Fortune, not

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wisdom, rules the lives of men" and "that the happy life cannot mount the scaffold to the wheel."<sup>62</sup>

CONTINUOUS PAIN IMPOSSIBLE