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

Post by “Cassius” of July 16, 2022 at 10:59 AM

I think we're generally in agreement except for this part....

> Quote from Don
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> Furthermore, wherever Epicurus is writing about calm, freedom from pain or trouble in body or mind, remembering or anticipating pleasure, etc. that he's writing about katastematic pleasure whether the word gets used or not.

...because I see no evidence in the core Epicurean texts that the Epicureans got around to mentioning the word "katastematic" except at best in rare instances. The idea that "absence of pain" equals katastematic pleasure seems to be an unwanted assumption. When the focus on life is pleasure, and you crowd out pains by replacing them with pleasures of all types, then there is no need to be concerned about what would happen if you attempted to bury yourself in a sensory deprivation chamber and somehow drained yourself if pains without replacing those pains with some form of mental or physical activity.

Cicero is attempting to go back to Plato's argument that pleasure cannot be continuous by insisting that if you aren't being stimulated in some way then you aren't experiencing pleasure. The very example he gives - of engaging in philosophic debate - has no need to be considered a hard case or a neutral state, because the mind is engaged in intense activity on an important subject - just like we are now - and we are experiencing a definite type of pleasure in hunting down the answers, even if there is much effort involved.

To me this argument from Cicero makes clear the problem in the whole "absence of pain" and "katastematic pleasure issue.". It is much more direct to consider all mental and physical consciousness of life to be pleasurable unless it involves significant pain, and thereby you never have to quibble about some "fancy pleasure" state that seems exotic and esoteric.

The discussion continues to convince me that the whole issue arises due to the desire of the anti-Epicureans to find a way to hijack Epicurus' focus on pleasure because they will not accept that pleasure as commonly understood is in fact desirable. They want to substitute their own "virtue-approved" definition for pleasure.

Epicurus had a clear and important reason for his sweeping definition of pleasure - to show how pleasure of some kind (including situations that seem to involve only calm reflection) is always available to be referenced as the guide of life. His enemies took this sweeping definition and decided to elevate the calm reflection part (which they consider themselves to be kings of) as

the ultimate goal. They did this by taking Epicurus' accurate observation - that when you have filled your life full of pleasure you cannot add any more because you are full - and took it out of context to adopt the "absence of pain" part as if it were something in itself, which it is not.

It is essential and important to explain to people that Pleasure in life comes through any kind of positive mental or physical activity that you don't find painful, including calm reflection. The contrast is made vivid by comparing it with the nothingness of availability of feeling after death. That part I think we are all agreed on.

But is it necessary to explain as a part of core Epicurean teaching the difference between kinetic and katastematic? The core texts don't, and even Torquatus himself, in his main narrative explaining Epicurean ethics, does not so much as mention the issue. It is only when it is used as an attack point by Cicero that Torquatus may address it at all. Lucretius and Philodemus, devoted advocates of the core, are also silent on it.

The value I am seeing in this conversation is that it is reinforcing to me that the entire katastematic/ kinetic discussion needs to be ejected from presentations of core Epicurean philosophy. Its main use going forward into the future in the presentation of an Epicurean curriculum should be to teach advanced students how the argument was used over the last two thousand years to relegate Epicurus into the corner of being a philosopher for nursing homes, and which thereby ejected from the largest part of normal healthy life. In that context the discussion is absolutely essential.

If one forces Hercules to spend every moment of his life clipping his toenails then even the physical strength and mental a acuity of a Hercules becomes absolutely neutered. There is no better way to sap the vitality from Epicurus as a savior of mankind than to force him to spin around endlessly in a word game like a dog chasing its own tale. I fully believe that Cicero saw just that opportunity, and his example has been followed ever since. No Epicurus in the camp, no Epicurus in the Senate, and no Epicurus anywhere in real human life.