

Can Determinism Be Reconciled With Epicureanism? (Admin Edit - No, But Let's Talk About Why Not)

Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2023 at 2:00 PM

Here is [Nikolsky](#) making the point I think we keep circling around:

Everyone agrees that we call the actions involved in satisfying thirsts, hungers, and our desires for any type of pleasure by the name of "pleasure."

The big question is not (1) whether to label the natural state of life in which we find ourselves after we have (temporarily) satisfied our immediate thirsts, hungers, and desires as either "katastematic pleasure or kinetic pleasure."

The big question is (2) whether to label "the natural state of life in which find ourselves after we have (temporarily) satisfied our immediate thirsts, hungers, and desires" by the name of "pleasure."

The reason that (2) is the big issue is that everyone does not agree with labeling (2) as Pleasure. Plato and Cicero and most of the orthodox world do not consider "the natural state of life in which we find ourselves after we have temporarily satisfied our immediate thirsts, hungers, and desires." And because they don't consider (2) to be a state of pleasure, they conclude that it is impossible to ever reach satisfaction, because you are constantly chasing new food, new drink, and new stimulations.

Once you take the position that "the natural state of life in which find ourselves after we have (temporarily) satisfied our immediate thirsts, hungers, and desires" is a pleasure, then it's easy to see that you can live a life of pleasure in most everything you do, even if you have never heard of the words "kinetic" or "katestematic."

I keep putting "temporarily" in brackets only because we all know that we'll get hungry and thirsty and want more pleasures every couple of hours so long as we continue to live. That observation doesn't matter to Epicurus, because he identifies *both* the state of acting to fulfill those desires, and the state of fulfillment, as pleasure, so the general condition of life is pleasure. It's only when some affirmative outside disruptive influence intrudes to cause pain that we are not in pleasure in that part of our experience.

Nikolsky says it this way:

sates from eating and drinking by compensation of a shortcoming of something or other in the organism.²¹ A similar description of pleasure is offered by Plato in the *Timaeus*: 'An impression produced in us contrary to nature and violent, if sudden, is painful; and, again, the sudden return to nature is pleasant';²² '[bodies feel] pleasure when restored to their natural conditions.'²³ This idea of pleasure as a 'return' to the natural state or its 'restoration' (κατάστασις) was taken over by the later philosophers

of the Academic school. It manifests itself in the definition of pleasure as 'sensate restoration' (κατάστασις αἰσθητή), which Aristotle gives in his *Rhetoric* (1369b) and which is examined in detail in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1153a) and in the Peripatetic *Magna Moralia* (1204b-1205a). Apparently, Epicurus adhered to a similar standpoint. This can be inferred from an explanation of pain and pleasure found in Lucretius (*De Rerum Nat.* 963-72): in answering the question why the atoms cannot feel pain and pleasure, Lucretius says:

*Praeterea, quoniam dolor est, ubi materiae // corpora vi quadam per viscera viva
per artus // sollicitata suis trepidant in sedibus intus, // inque locum quando remi-
grant, fit blanda voluptas, // scire licet nullo primordia posse dolore // temptari
nullamque voluptatem capere ex se; // quandoquidem non sunt ex ullis principio-
rum // corporibus, quorum motus novitate laborent // aut aliquem fructum capi-
ant dulcedinis almae. // haut igitur debent esse ullo praedita sensu.*

Thus, the Epicurean view of the physical nature of pleasure as a whole varies little from that of other philosophers: in Epicurus' opinion, pleasure is experienced when the atoms of a human body, acted upon by a certain force, find themselves in their proper places, i.e., when the organism attains its natural state under the effect of some influence. Epicurus, however, differed from his predecessors on one essential point. When speaking about pleasure as restoration, Plato and his followers meant by this only the process of restoration, separating this process from its result and believing that it leads to a neutral state, a state of rest when both pleasure and pain are absent. Proceeding from this, they proved that pleasure cannot be the actual good and end: from their point of view, it is a process of becoming leading to another end different from it – the absence of pain. For example, when we satisfy hunger, the end is not pleasure but the state of satiety regarded by the Academics as neutral.²⁴ By contrast, I propose, and aiming to refute this argument, Epicurus links pleasure not only with the process but also with the result of restoration, i.e., with the natural state which the organism attains. In connection with this new interpretation of pleasure Epicurus introduces his own term κατάστημα; unlike the Academy's term κατάστασις, cognate with it, it denoted the result and not the process of restoration. If we take into account all those associations with the traditional description of pleasure which the root verb καθίστημι carried, and also if we do not ignore the description of the nature of