

# The Use of Negation in Epicurean Philosophy Concepts

Post by "Cassius" of April 21, 2025 at 9:28 AM

Don's summary of the issue is excellent. I would only add that in addition to the conclusion that there's no reason to read Epicurus because he's the same as Buddhism and Stoicism, you of course add on the huge baggage of *why* one should not choose to pursue Buddhism or Stoicism.

## [Quote from Rolf](#)

That said, I'm not sure I quite see the point at issue here. Pleasures vary in duration, intensity, and location. Of course I would prefer a katastematic pleasure. More sustainable, longer lasting pleasure. It's like asking someone if they want \$1000 now or \$100 per month for 2 years. It's a matter of prudence.

Yes, that statement illustrates how confusing this question can be. The issue is that when most people (excluding those who see it like Don does) talk about katastematic pleasure, they are not simply referring to "any pleasure that is sustainable and longer lasting." And they are not talking about katastematic pleasure as "one of many kinds of pleasure." The point I am arguing against is that many people explicitly or implicitly state that katastematic pleasure, which they equate with "ataraxia" or "freedom from pain" is the ultimate goal of Epicurean pleasure, rather than the much wider term "pleasure," which includes katastemic pleasure, but also includes kinetic pleasure.

Of course at this point we're already down the road of glazing over peoples' eyes because they understandably aren't sure what "katastematic" and "kinetic" means, so they default to thinking that it means "ataraxia" which is also highly ambiguous or just "absence of pain" which means nothing standing alone any more than it would be to say "absence of elephants." "Absence of....." doesn't tell you anything unless you have a conceptual framework that there are only two possibilities, and that the only other possibility is pleasure. But the people I am arguing against rarely explain that, because their whole issue is that they don't want to accept the common understanding of "pleasure" in the first place, because that would draw a bright red line between Epicurus and Buddhism and Stoicism.

So many commentators package this question into the view that katastematic pleasure is the only really desirable pleasure, and that the only reason we care about kinetic pleasures is so that we can obtain katastematic pleasure. They argue that once we have katasatematic pleasure we no longer have need of kinetic pleasure, and they'll cite this part of the letter to Menoeceus: *"For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and, when once we*

*have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living creature has no need to go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look for anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled. When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure."*

And indeed if you are the normal man on the street today and take that statement at face value, it DOES sound Buddhist or Stoic or worse. The problem only gets resolved when you take into account Epicurus's many statements about pleasure in the rest of the philosophy, including the fact that (as with gods) Epicurus is giving a very unusual meaning to a term that everyone else uses differently. But no man-on-the-street has the experience to be able to do that, so they run in the opposite direction. Which in my view is exactly the goal of the perps I am referring to, because their goal is to remain smugly happy in their eclectic blends of Buddhism and Stoicism without worry that anyone will ever see that Epicurus was arguing *against* their position, not *in favor of it*.

Gosling and Taylor exhaustively go through many examples of the contradictions that the standard view of katastematic pleasure causes, G&T conclude that these contradictions do not mean that katastematic pleasure is somehow the ultimate goal of Epicurean philosophy: they conclude that Epicurus saw pleasure as a unified thing, and that katastematic pleasure is only one sort of pleasure. And that's where [Nikolsky](#) picks up and points out that in the centuries between Epicurus and Cicero (and additional time after that to Diogenes Laertius) people like Carneades - in their fetish to categorize things - placed an emphasis on this division that is not mentioned by the true believers like Lucretius and Diogenes of Oinoanda or to my recollection Philodemus either, and thus was not of major significance to Epicurus himself.

But it's become the hallmark of discussion of Epicurus in the modern world because when accepted in the way it is often discussed, it turns much of the philosophy upside down and makes much of the rest of it self-contradictory.