

Preuss - "Epicurean Ethics - Katastematic Hedonism"

Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2025 at 9:26 PM

I started to include this following clip earlier but will do so now. I agree with Preuss that Epicurus' position that the wise man is happy even under torture is extremely important and pregnant with implications. But i do not agree with him that the reason that the wise man remains happy under torture is that he is experiencing "katastematic pleasure" while under torture. Nor do I think that Epicurus was happy on his last day due to "katastematic pleasure."

I think that Epicurus considered himself happy even during kidney pain, and the wise man under torture can be considered happy even under torture, not because he is in fact experiencing some kind of indescribable state of feeling, but because in both cases we're making a mental evaluation of the entire scope of the life in question, and choosing to look at the good as outweighing the bad. That's a conscious mental evaluation and takes great effort to appreciate, and anything that takes great effort to understand and appreciate is a mental activity that requires a lot more than thinking that just as a matter of the blessedness of nature we can store up some kind of superhuman reservoir of "katastematic pleasure" to call on when we are under torture. Were that true, then Epicurus would have wanted to continue to live on indefinitely despite his kidney pain, and that's where it becomes important whether Epicurus in fact committed suicide or hastened his own death. "Katastematic pleasure" doesn't outweigh unrelenting extended interminable extreme kinetic pain.

Being alive and conscious means our minds having an ongoing evaluation of whether our lives have been and are worthwhile, the vast majority of which time has been spent in "kinetic" activities, and there's nothing mysterious about that or necessary to identify as some kind of special or higher or "katastematic" pleasure that is our "true goal."

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the stable condition of the flesh (sarkos eustathes katastēma). As we have already noted above, this condition is identified by Epicurus as a kinetic pleasure and cannot, if only for that reason, count as a definition of pleasure. The idea that we have here a definition of pleasure is in any event an addition by Gellius which probably was not meant seriously in any technical sense. We shall not comment in detail on the notion of katastematic pleasure here since that would be difficult to do briefly without simply presupposing a reading of katastematic pleasure which we have not yet given. But we might point out here that Epicurus thought that katastematic pleasure was possible under torture²¹⁸ which cannot be thought to be a stable or a comfortable condition of the flesh; and, if katastematic pleasure can be identified with happiness, then Epicurus' claim that he was happy, even blessed, near death and while in great kinetic pain,²¹⁹ also indicates that katastematic pleasure is compatible with kinetic pain and an unstable condition of the body. Such considerations, and others, should make us very hesitant to adopt the essentially Ciceronian interpretation of kinetic and katastematic pleasure in terms of satisfying and satisfied desire.