

Preuss - "Epicurean Ethics - Katastematic Hedonism"

Post by "DistantLaughter" of July 12, 2025 at 10:56 PM

Hi Cassius, thanks for the engagement.

#1

I'm sympathetic to [Nikolsky's](#) view that the katastematic/kinetic distinction, as commonly deployed, is a later conceptual imposition rather than a central Epicurean principle. While later sources like Cicero and Diogenes Laertius develop this framework, the extant writings of Epicurus suggest a more fluid and pragmatic focus on the removal of pain and fear as the path to tranquility—without rigid typologies. Thus, I tend to agree that Epicurus did not place strong emphasis on this distinction, at least not in the technical sense that later interpreters project onto him.

#2

Thanks for this strong and well-articulated response—I genuinely appreciate your clarity and conviction. I think we may agree more than it seems, though we might diverge on emphasis and interpretive framing.

You're absolutely right that pleasure, not "peace of mind" as such, is the goal of Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus is explicit about this in the *Letter to Menoeceus*. But where the disagreement often arises is over *what kind* of pleasure constitutes the telos. When Epicurus says the wise man "does not choose the greatest quantity of food but the most pleasant," the pleasant turns out to be that which contributes to a tranquil and painless state of body and mind—a katastematic condition, even if he doesn't use that term himself. So, when some people talk about "peace of mind" as the goal, they're typically using it as shorthand for that condition of *ongoing, stable pleasure* free from turmoil—rather than as a mystical or detached asceticism.

I completely agree that Epicureanism is not about disengagement from life. That's where I think your reading is most powerful. The lives of Epicurus, Lucretius, and Diogenes of Oinoanda show that the philosophy demands intellectual work, even polemic, in service of freeing people from fear and confusion. But the goal of that labor is precisely to attain and preserve a state of freedom from disturbance, not to glorify striving or motion for its own sake. That's why the "agitation" over fine distinctions can ironically work *against* the aim of those distinctions.

The concern isn't that activity itself is bad—Epicurus himself wrote extensively and encouraged philosophical conversation—but that we should choose activity wisely, guided by whether it contributes to lasting pleasure and peace. So in that light, the worry about "disengagement" might misfire if it treats tranquility as a withdrawal rather than a cultivated condition of

maximal enjoyment, given the constraints of mortal life.

As for the references to death and reincarnation, I'm with you: Epicurus is unambiguous—[death is nothing to us](#). Any move toward ambiguity there would indeed be surprising, and potentially inconsistent with the core doctrines.

I look forward to continuing this discussion when the time zones allow—very glad to be engaging with someone who's clearly thought deeply and personally about these questions.