

Another Article Insisting On The Importance of the Kinetic / Katestematic Distinction, Despite Citing Nikolsky

Post by "Cassius" of September 28, 2019 at 6:35 PM

Thanks to Hiram for pointing out today an article on the kinetic / katestematic issue. The article is "'Epicurus' "Kinetic" and "Katestematic" Pleasures. A Reappraisal", *Elenchos* xxxvi (2015) fasc. 2: 271-296." I find the conclusion (which includes the assertion that kinetic pleasure is unnecessary) most unpersuasive:

YOSEF Z. LIEBERSOHN

EPICURUS' "KINETIC" AND "KATESTEMATIC" PLEASURES. A REAPPRAISAL

Abstract

In this paper I shall offer new definitions for what seem to be the most dominant terms in Epicurus' theory of pleasures – "kinetic" and "katestematic". While most of the scholarly literature treats these terms as entirely concerned with states of motion and states of stability, I shall argue that the distinction concerns whether pain is or is not removed by this or that pleasure. As the removal of pain is a necessary condition for the Epicurean goal of *ataraxia* and *aponia*, "katestematic" pleasure, having to do with the removal of pain, is the necessary pleasure pertaining both to the process of removing pain and to its result, namely the absence of pain, while "kinetic" pleasure is an unnecessary pleasure having nothing to do with the removal of pain, e.g. it starts after pain has been removed. If my analysis and interpretation prove correct, the two conventional classifications – "kinetic-katestematic" and "necessary-unnecessary" – turn out to be referring to the same phenomenon and are aspects of one classification. Moreover, this new interpretation resolves some of the main problems arising from our testimonia concerning "kinetic" and "katestematic" pleasures.

On the other hand, the article I think helps bolster the argument that the entire katatesmetic / kinetic distinction is a dead end. Note here the opening, which alleges that these are "the most dominant terms in Epicurus' theory of pleasures:

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That's just pure nonsense. Did he not read his own footnotes, which cites [the Nikolsky article I point toward so frequently](#)? This shows that the writer fully understood that the kinetic / katastemtic classification cannot be traced to the founding Epicureans themselves.

³ I shall mention here one main problem concerning such a reconstruction. Nowhere in our testimonia do all four pairs appear together. In most cases we have only a reference to this or that pair, and only in a few places do we have a mention of two pairs. For example, at *Kyriai Doxai* (= *KD*) 28 and *Menoec.* 127 we find "necessary-unnecessary" and "natural-unnatural", and at *DIOG. LAERT.* X 136 we seem to have "bodily-mental" and "kinetic-katastematic".

So in my view this article does not help in the way the writer intended, but it does help illustrate once again how little evidence there is that this distinction mattered to Epicurus.

Post by "Cassius" of July 2, 2022 at 8:19 AM

I see my links have disappeared. Will try to reconstruct them.

OK Did the best I could. I will now add the conclusion statement. Does this help anything at all? We are now supposed to consider katastematic pleasures as all pleasures concerned with

removal of pain and therefore "necessary" pleasures and kinetic all other pleasures and therefore "unnecessary"? I don't think that makes any sense at all.

5. Summary

The "Process-Result Interpretation" for explaining the classification of pleasures into katastematic and kinetic pleasures should be abandoned⁶⁸. The criterion for distinguishing and classifying katastematic and kinetic pleasures is the removal of pain. Katastematic pleasure is concerned with the removal of pain, making no categorical distinction between the process of removing pain and the end of this process, the absence of pain. Kinetic pleasure has nothing to do with the removal of pain, and hence is wholly concerned with the motion itself. As removing

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pain is necessary and pleasures which have nothing to do with removing pain are unnecessary, katastematic and kinetic pleasures are different kinds of pleasures and are to be identified with necessary and unnecessary pleasures respectively.

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Post by "Kalosyni" of July 7, 2022 at 11:40 AM

This article is a bit beyond me (without starting at the beginning and reading it all the way through, which I don't want to do).

Here is a definition from Wikipedia: "In [Epicurean](#) philosophy, **katastematic pleasure** is pleasure felt when being in a state of freedom from need or want, as opposed to kinetic

pleasure, which is felt while performing a gratifying activity. [1][2] Absence of pain, [aponia](#), and lack of disturbance of mind, [ataraxia](#), are two of the katastematic pleasures and often seen as the focal ones to [Epicurus](#)."

Sometimes engaging in a kinetic pleasure results in katastematic pleasure -- for example: eating healthy food in just the right quantity, and the enjoyable activity (kinetic pleasure) only lasts maybe ten minutes while you are eating, but the katastematic pleasure lasts maybe 3 or so hours. Then maybe you get hungry again and would eat a small healthy snack to hold you over till your next meal.

I think it would be safe to say that all kinetic pleasures are good, but we may choose not to do them if they result in much worse pains, if they create undue anxiety or physical pain. PD 8 -

"No pleasure is bad in itself; but the means of paying for some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves".

This all makes more sense if we think about the differences in people and preferences. An introvert will be more sensitive to internal bodily feelings and likely will put much more emphasis on feeling katastematic pleasure -- even being much more likely to sense the presence of katastematic pleasure compared to an extrovert. An extrovert is busy moving and doing things and processes bodily sensations differently than an introvert (and so may need to put more effort into practicing PD 8 making sure not to over-indulge in pleasures that produce bad pains or bad results in the future).

Post by "Cassius" of July 7, 2022 at 12:28 PM

Without taking the time to look back at the editing history of that entry, I would say that is a good example of how Wikipedia must be taken with a grain of salt. There really is no one who is an "authority" on this issue, so anyone who stands up to present a definition ought to be clear to state that there are experts on several sides of this question. I doubt seriously whether Gosling and Taylor of [Nikolsky](#) or any number of others would endorse that passage in whole.

Flatly stating something as if it accepted, without noting controversies, is a good way to pile misinformation on top of misinformation. That's pretty much the core thrust of the Epicurean sayings about waiting and not selecting only one position when the evidence is not clear.

And almost every phrase of that summary is open to serious question, and as it is I would say that entry does a lot more harm than good.

Just to be clear of course I do not mean to criticize anyone citing that article, because it's important for us to know that it is there, and we can't expect everyone to trace back every issue to it's core..

But the cultural effect of a resource like Wikipedia appearing to be an arbiter of truth in an instance like this is really an interesting and not a positive thing.

I guess the ultimate Epicurean perspective is to always remember that there IS no "arbiter of truth" and we are always just doing the best we can to develop opinions consistent with the evidence in front of us.

Post by “Cassius” of July 7, 2022 at 12:36 PM

Kalosyni"s caution to the extrovert in her post above reminds me of the flip side: Thomas Jefferson's caution to an "introvert" (of a kind) in his letter to William Short:

"I take the liberty of observing that you are not a true disciple of our master Epicurus, in indulging the indolence to which you say you are yielding. One of his canons, you know, was that "that indulgence which prevents a greater pleasure, or produces a greater pain, is to be avoided." Your love of repose will lead, in its progress, to a suspension of healthy exercise, a relaxation of mind, an indifference to everything around you, and finally to a debility of body, and hebetude of mind, the farthest of all things from the happiness which the well-regulated indulgences of Epicurus ensure; fortitude, you know is one of his four cardinal virtues. That teaches us to meet and surmount difficulties; not to fly from them, like cowards; and to fly, too, in vain, for they will meet and arrest us at every turn of our road. Weigh this matter well; brace yourself up; take a seat with Correa, and come and see the finest portion of your country, which, if you have not forgotten, you still do not know, because it is no longer the same as when you knew it."

Post by “Don” of July 7, 2022 at 1:33 PM

I'm going to point back to my post on the title of Metrodorus 's as well as the quote from that book:

Post

[RE: Do Pigs Value Katastematic Pleasure? \(Summer 2022 K / K Discussion\)](#)

I wanted to address the title of Metrodorus's book that is cited by Clement of Alexandria.

The title in Greek is:

Περι του μειζονα ειναι την παρ' ημας αιτιαν προς ευδαιμονιαν της εκ των πραγματων

The "New Advent" English translation is:

On the Source of Happiness in Ourselves being greater than that which arises from Objects

I don't entirely agree with the translation choices made there, but they'll do well enough.

What I want to do is look at several key words that impact our current discussion on...



Don

July 4, 2022 at 4:46 PM

I think there is a definite distinction between pleasures. I don't think it's necessarily a hierarchy, but it seems there are pleasures of a state and pleasures from activities or objects outside ourselves.

Post by “Cassius” of July 7, 2022 at 1:52 PM

To Don's point:

Right, and of course -- there are definite distinctions between pleasures. The real issue and controversy is over the place and hierarchy of the two categories, as conveyed in "Absence of pain, [aponia](#), and lack of disturbance of mind, [ataraxia](#), are two of the katastematic pleasures and often seen as the focal ones to [Epicurus](#)." To the extent that that sentence says that (1) aponia and ataraxia are katastematic pleasures, and (2) they are "focal ones" to Epicurus (implying of central importance) I would context both of those statements are highly open to debate and the controversy should have at least been noted in the article.

And the really irritating aspect of the controversy is that the implication of those who are primarily arguing for katastematic pleasure as being superior is that they also argue that

katastematic pleasure is not something that is "sensed" in the normal way. As pointed out by Wenham, to any normal interpretation of the sensory basis of Epicurean philosophy, something that is not experienced is worth nothing.

And all of this argument is based on the most slender of threads in Diogenes Laertius as amplified by Cicero hundreds of years later, while not a word about it is breathed in Lucretius or virtually any other source.

Two more comments:

1 - I am always quick to remember the William Short quote about guarding against lethargy because of all people I am the most guilty of it! 😊

2 - Those Wikipedia articles on Epicurus and Epicureanism are full of the same assertions, without any reference to any disagreement among those who read him. And they all lead back and lay the groundwork for the conclusions in the main article, that the "greatest good" is not pleasure, but ataraxia / aponia / "peace of mind." That the key to working with desires is to LIMIT them and live "the simple life" (which is not *always* the case), that all Epicureans should withdraw from politics (with which the Roman Epicureans begged to differ)



I try to always be clear on that. Someone who values that aspect of Epicureanism will benefit from Epicurean philosophy and find justification for their choices. But in doing so, such people are way out of line in suggesting that that is the ONLY way to practice Epicureanism, and that their reinterpretation of the key wording, displacing "Pleasure" from the ultimate standard of action, is again way over the line in what the texts allow them to do.

It's not the "kinetic" valuers who try to writer the "katastematics" out of Epicurean philosophy, it's the "Katastematics" who use every opportunity to claim Epicurus for themselves as if they needed more than the Stoics and the Platonists and the entire rest of Greek philosophy to justify their choices.

When all the while Diogenes Laertius was very clear that Epicurus held both to be valuable, and he never clearly labeled one as subordinate or instrumental to the other.

"Epicurus differs from the Cyrenaics about pleasure. For they do not admit static pleasure, but only that which consists in motion. But Epicurus admits BOTH kinds BOTH in the soul and in the body, as he says in the work on Choice and Avoidance and in the book on The Ends of Life and in the first book On Lives and in the letter to his friends in Mytilene"

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 7, 2022 at 3:48 PM

Cassius, I see what you are saying, that you are saying that it looks like the Wikipedia article is saying that the goal of life is living a quiet and simple life and not doing anything fun.

Yet I was seeing the Wikipedia entry as encompassing a greater whole and including all pleasures, but I was wrong to assume that everyone else could see it that way as well - especially those who haven't studied as much will end up misunderstanding. So it is good that you explain this again. I see that I need to be more careful as to how I express this in the future, to make sure it is clearer.

From the Letter to Menoikeus: "Reflect on what brings happiness, because if you have that you have everything, but if not you will do everything to attain it."

Every pleasure is good, but if you are living in such a way as which causes you to often have a disturbed mind or causes you unnatural levels of physical pain, then your happiness will be very short lived.

And so now, for example, this would mean that anyone who wants to engage in politics or running for political office and while also adequately maintaining their sanity and their peace of mind is welcome to do so - in other words if they can live happily and enjoyably - then they would be following the wisdom of Epicurean philosophy. That's how I see it 😊

Post by “Cassius” of July 7, 2022 at 4:03 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

it looks like the Wikipedia article is saying that the goal of life is living a quiet and simple life and not doing anything fun.

Yes that is exactly my concern, with the caveat too that "fun" means a lot of different things to different people.

What I mean even more clearly is that the "Academic World," which is firmly Stoic/Platonic/Aristotelian, has a strongly vested interest in conveying to everyone that : *"Epicurus held the goal of life is living a quiet and simple life and not doing anything to displease the Stoics / Platonists / Aristotelians."*

None of these guys have cared to lift a finger to support or reinvigorate the Epicurean school for 2000 years, but they are all too happy to give YOU a hundred reasons why YOU should sit quietly and should not do so yourself!

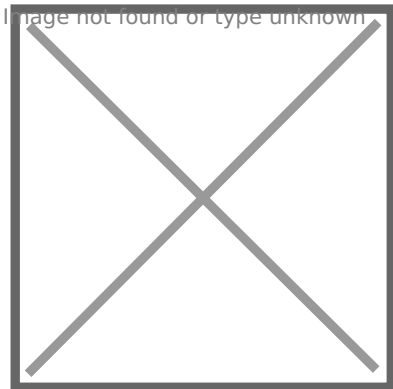
"Just stay home and live a quiet simple life and forget about Cassius Longinus and the whole flock of Epicurean Romans from poets to leaders of society to generals who refused to go quietly and be told what to do.."

That's the clear message I get from the way these guys are focusing on "tranquility" and acting as if "pleasure" wasn't in Epicurus' vocabulary.

That's what I would tell my cows and my pigs if I were a farmer as I lead them to the slaughterhouse too! 😊

Post by “Don” of July 9, 2022 at 9:12 AM

We have at least two threads on this topic now, so I'll post this here:



[Practicing Ataraxia at Lucretius' De rerum natura 2.7-8](#)

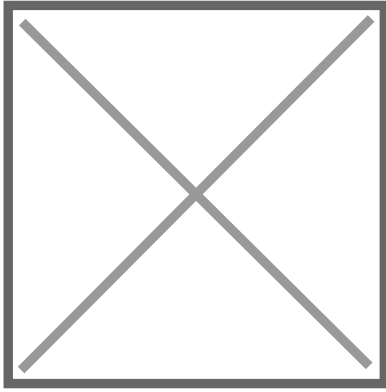
Practicing Ataraxia at Lucretius' De rerum natura 2.7-8

www.academia.edu

This paper by Eckerman emphasizes the importance of ataraxia in dealing with life's circumstances. What I like is his pulling in specific lines of Lucretius and Epicurus.

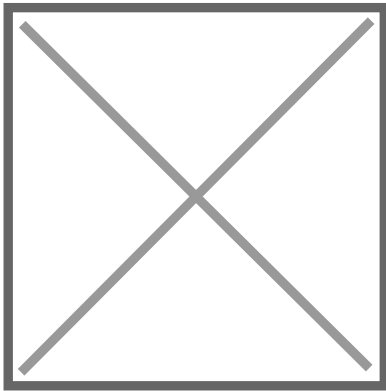
Here's a related paper:

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1182-another-article-insisting-on-the-importance-of-the-kinetic-katestematic-distinct/>



[Ataraxia Vanquishes Eros: Lucretius' Sappho at De rerum natura 2.1-8, forthcoming](#)
Ataraxia Vanquishes Eros: Lucretius' Sappho at De rerum natura 2.1-8, forthcoming
www.academia.edu

And one more:



[Ratio, Aponia, Ataraxia: On the Proem of Book Two of Lucretius' De rerum natura](#)
Ratio, Aponia, Ataraxia: On the Proem of Book Two of Lucretius' De rerum natura
www.academia.edu

I posted another Eckerman paper on the gods previously:

Post

[**"Lucretius on the Divine" - Dr. Christopher Eckerman**](#)

I believe I posted this paper to another thread, but I'm putting it here for its pertinence to this topic:

<https://www.academia.edu/resource/work/35459633>

He's Eckerman's info. He may be someone to explore further.

<https://cas.uoregon.edu/directory/clas...ty/all/eckerman>

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1182-another-article-insisting-on-the-importance-of-the-kinetic-katestematic-distinct/>

<https://uoregon.academia.edu/ChristopherEckerman>

There are several Lucretius papers posted at his Academia page!



Don

May 24, 2022 at 6:28 AM

Post by “Godfrey” of July 9, 2022 at 6:41 PM

Liebersohn's article is a fascinating case study. His simple proposition is that katastematic pleasure is necessary, whereas kinetic pleasure is unnecessary.

However it quickly becomes evident that his thinking is grounded in Platonism and this defines his entire approach to arguing his proposition. I imagine that even conceiving of this proposition was determined by his evident Platonic background, but it's possible to examine his proposition from outside of Platonism, which of course is how I and most of us here would probably approach it.

Here are two ways that he states his proposition:

1) *"As the removal of pain is a necessary condition for Epicurean ataraxia and aponia, 'katastematic' pleasure, having to do with the removal of pain, is the necessary pleasure pertaining both to the process of removing pain and to its result... while 'kinetic' pleasure is an unnecessary pleasure having nothing to do with the removal of pain, e.g. it starts after pain has been removed."* [Now this sounds thoroughly Platonic, Ciceronian perhaps]

2) *"I propose to distinguish between 'moving towards an end', i.e. movement which has an end (the absence of pain) and 'moving qua moving', i.e. movement which has no end (it is concerned with its own movement)".* [If he had left out the parenthetical "absence of pain", I might find this an interesting topic for discussion. But I haven't given that much thought because that's not what he's arguing. It is, however, why I read his article.]

I'm not a scholar and don't want to disturb my ataraxia by making a counter argument to his article. I do want to point out that he's apparently done a great deal of research in preparing his article. He even quotes DeWitt: "as was rightly detected by N. DeWitt... [EAHP pp. 7-8]... Plato did not regard pleasure as the highest good since it is "becoming" rather than "being".... And a chunk of his article is devoted to discussing [Nikolsky](#). But his conclusions are for the most part diametrically opposed to what I think I would conclude from reviewing the same material that he reviewed. (The only footnote that I checked was one referencing Long and Sedley's The

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1182-another-article-insisting-on-the-importance-of-the-kinetic-katestematic-distinct/>

Hellenistic Philosophers. He seemed to be referencing from a different edition than the kindle version that I have, and I couldn't find his reference on the pages that he cited. However what I guessed he was referring to didn't say at all what he was suggesting, but I can't say that I was pointing to the same quote as he was.)

The way he approaches his proposition is steeped in absence of pain and, apparently, hierarchical pleasures. And he favorably mentions absence of pain as a neutral state. It pretty much made my head spin the way his conclusions seemed to differ from mine. When he points out a passage that I would read as supporting my interpretation of pleasure, he argues off in an entirely different direction. But I do find this article to be useful as a case study, although I've spent more than enough time with it now and leave that study to someone more academically minded than me.

There are two things he suggests, which I don't think that I've heard before. First is that the Principle Doctrines may include statements by later Epicureans as well, based on Bailey's Epicurus The Extent Remains pp. 344-7. This is counter to my understanding: has it ever been disputed or disproved, or is this accepted? I thought this was the case with the Vatican Sayings but not the Principle Doctrines.

Secondly, he gives a date for the Letter to Menoecus as c. 296-295 BC (J.E Hessler, Proposte sulla data di composizione e il destinatario dell'Epistola a Meneceo, <Cronache Ercolanesi>, XLI (2011) pp. 7-11). He also states that this letter "was intended to reach a wider public who might still be under the influence of an erroneous philosophy or of the unsupported maxims and opinions of popular thought [per Bailey ETER p. 327]... in the [LM] there appear colloquial terms such as 'necessary-unnecessary' (Menoec. 127), while technical terms such as 'kinetic' and 'katestematic' populate treatises such as [that referenced in Diogenes Laertius X 136], addressed to the devoted Epicurean." Liebersohn states elsewhere that Menoecus was a beginner in the philosophy; to my understanding there's no information regarding Menoecus; this must be inferred from the Bailey quote or perhaps some foreign language publication.

One last comment. To go out on a limb, I'm still not convinced that there are necessary and unnecessary pleasures. I'm convinced that there are necessary and unnecessary *desires*, but to me desires are quite different from pleasures. So for me, his proposition is invalid on these grounds although others here may disagree.

Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2022 at 7:25 PM

Yes Godfey, lots of good stuff in your post. The single thing I would particularly echo is the concern about "necessary" and "unnecessary" pleasures. There is no way to avoid, IMHO, the

implication that someone who is talking about "unnecessary" pleasures seems to be relegating those pleasures to the modern ear to a second-place status.

I don't think that this was Epicurus' intent, and I don't think that he expected his words to be interpreted that way, but that's the way they are being interpreted in many corners, and I think that a full understanding of Epicurus requires a clear position that there isn't a list of "unnecessary" absolutes out there that end up pointing us to life in the proverbial cave in pursuit of only those that are "necessary."

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 9, 2022 at 7:36 PM

Maybe there was a list, but it has been lost? [Don](#) quoted this in another [thread](#):

Quote

Seneca, Letter 66: For the absolute good of man's nature is satisfied with peace in the body and peace in the soul. I can show you at this moment in the writings of Epicurus a graded list of goods just like that of our own school. For there are some things, he declares, which he prefers should fall to his lot, such as bodily rest free from all inconvenience, and relaxation of the soul as it takes delight in the contemplation of its own goods.

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 9, 2022 at 7:45 PM

Since we are limited by having only the very few remains of Epicurus' writings through other sources, then in some sense we must all be "neo-Epicurean". Also, there are circumstances in modern life that are much different than in Epicurus' time, which may alter how the teachings should be interpreted.

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 9, 2022 at 7:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

there isn't a list of "unnecessary" absolutes out there that end up pointing us to life in the proverbial cave in pursuit of only those that are "necessary."

From Letter to Menoikos: 'Third, keep in mind that some desires are natural whereas others are groundless; that among the natural desires some are natural and necessary whereas others are merely natural; and that among the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, some for physical health, and some for life itself.'

There is just this very open way of referring to different desires, and as I think about it then it would only make sense if Epicurus had clearly defined all of these categories.

Post by “Cassius” of July 9, 2022 at 8:43 PM

"I can show you at this moment in the writings of Epicurus a graded list of goods just like that of our own school."

Yes that's a good catch, but as far as we know the Epicureans themselves (Philodemus, Lucretius, etc) didn't see fit to preserve such a list. There are lots of other cautions that could be made to taking that too far, but I think that's the most important ones, plus we do have the parts about natural and necessary and other issues that could also be considered to be sort of a gradation. But in the end, would one expect there to be an absolute list that's much more specific than food, water, air, shelter, etc? And in the end, even those do not take precedence at every moment of life.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Also, there are circumstances in modern life that are much different than in Epicurus' time, which may alter how the teachings should be interpreted.

Absolutely there are differences in circumstances that would lead the general principles to be APPLIED in different ways, but if the core teachings themselves needed fundamental "reinterpreton" then that would just be a way of saying that the philosophy core teachings are no longer relevant, which I would say is not true.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

then it would only make sense if Epicurus had clearly defined all of these categories.

Yes, any categories that Epicurus were really concerned about he would want to define, I agree. But the absence of more deliberate and stricter definitions in the core teachings also says something in the direction that what we are talking about are "principles" that will have different applications in different circumstances.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 10, 2022 at 12:48 AM

It sounds like Seneca is describing aponia and ataraxia. But that's a good quote; I'm certainly curious what list he might be referring to!

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

There is just this very open way of referring to different desires, and as I think about it then it would only make sense if Epicurus had clearly defined all of these categories.

I've always understood Epicurus' descriptions of the types of desires as all that's required. I agree with [Cassius](#) that these are principles which provide guidance in making decisions. We can use them now, in a society much different from that of Epicurus, whereas a specific list from ancient Greece could be open to misinterpretation. For example, from some of [Don](#)'s posts it sounds like the typical Athenian diet may have been much different from what we eat today. So for us it would be unnecessary and possibly bothersome to try to mimic the ancient diet when we have modern standards as to what is healthy and easily obtained.