

Discussion of the thread - Against Katastematic Supremacy - Pleasure Is A Unified Whole And Not A House Divided - Forum Editorial Policy

Post by “Cassius” of July 16, 2026 at 3:07 PM

This thread is for discussion of the post



Against Katastematic Supremacy - Pleasure Is A Unified Good, Not A House Divided Against Itself - INCLUDES FORUM EDITORIAL POLICY

The Current Establishment View - Which It Is the Editorial Policy Of EpicureanFriends.com to Reject

With only a few notable exceptions, practically every modern account of Epicurean ethics repeats the same claim: Epicurus divided pleasure into two distinct kinds, ranked one above the other. Pleasure, like a house, cannot stand if it is divided against itself — and that is exactly the structure this traditional reading imposes on it. On this traditional view, **kinetic** pleasure covers everything...



Cassius

July 16, 2026 at 2:06 PM

Post by “DaveT” of July 16, 2026 at 4:01 PM

I have trouble understanding that explanation of policy. It seems overly rigid. Certainly a person can feel katastematic pleasure over longer periods of time than physical pleasure. Can we agree to that? No one can actually feel physical pleasure over a prolonged time period, but we can't feel prolonged physical contentment i.e. the absence of any mental discomfort for a prolonged period. After all, physical pain and discomfort are crucial bodily mechanisms to maintaining good health. So why is it unreasonable to distinguish the two forms of pleasure just within those distinctions?

Post by “Cassius” of July 16, 2026 at 4:30 PM

There are all sorts of things that are reasonable Dave, but prolonged advocacy that Epicurus held that anything other than the word Pleasure is the supreme good is the target of this policy for the reasons stated in the article.

If the policy is unclear in some way please let me know. The goal is to reinforce the ultimate conclusion that appears at the head of this forum (*If then even the glory of the Virtues, on*

which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on Pleasure, whereas Pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that Pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of Pleasure.")

which is the same as stated by Seneca to be posted outside the forum. *Here our highest good is PLEASURE.*

I think that those outside the forum who advance the argument which is the target of this policy probably understand very well the rhetorical question that is involved. The issue is not fine-tuning types of pleasure so as to reach the best result - that is a primary subject for us all to address. The question is what IS the best result, and as Diogenes of Oinoanda finally had to shout - a life of happiness is a life of *pleasure*. He did not shout *katastematic pleasure*, he shouted pleasure.

What is not acceptable here is to adopt the rhetoric of people who want to substitute some other term for pleasure as the description of the supreme good, and who run from use of the term pleasure as if it is embarrassing.

There are many places that people who believe that approach is best can advocate for it - *outside this forum*.

No doubt this policy will reduce the actual or potential number of participants here. We could become immensely more popular by adopting the rhetoric displayed in my collection of "[World's Worst Epicurus Videos](#)." But that's not an acceptable goal for this forum.

Post by "Cassius" of July 16, 2026 at 4:56 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Certainly a person can feel *katastematic* pleasure over longer periods of time than physical pleasure. Can we agree to that?

And interestingly, no - we can't even agree to that.. The "experts" themselves are all over the board as to what pleasures really fall within *katastematic* and *kinetic* in the first place. I have been going through the Kelly Arenson book today and she - who like Emily Austin largely if not fully agrees with the fundamentals of the Gosling & Taylor and [Nikolsky](#) position cited in my article - has a very different interpretation than I have seen before.

So no - other than the flat statement that Diogenes Laertius records Epicurus himself having said, there is very little if anything we can agree on with certainty as to anything about the meaning of "katastematic" or "kinetic" or the implications of those terms.

On the other hand, there is much we can agree on about pleasure. And while the katastematic-kinetic debate occupies some for another 2000 years, normal people need a fundamental understanding of Epicurus that focuses on pleasure as the category that defines the goal.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

After all, physical pain and discomfort are crucial bodily mechanisms to maintaining good health. So why is it unreasonable to distinguish the two forms of pleasure just within those distinctions?

It is not unreasonable at all to distinguish pleasures in terms of how long they last, what parts of the body they effect, and how intense they are? What is necessary about adding on words like "kinetic" and "katastematic" on top of that which Epicurus himself did not include in [PD09](#)?

Post by "Cassius" of July 16, 2026 at 10:41 PM

Dave - You wrote:

[Quote from DaveT](#)

.Certainly a person can feel katastematic pleasure over longer periods of time than physical pleasure. Can we agree to that?

it appears to me that we can include among those who would not agree with that Professor Kelly Aronsen in her 2019 *Health and Hedonism in Plato and Epicurus*. There, Aronsen parses kinetic vs. katastematic entirely differently from the mental vs physical your question implies:

Quote from Kelly Aronsen

Contrary to the dominant scholarly view, I argue that there is good reason to avoid classifying non-restorative pleasures as kinetic since they are not derived from movements toward painless, healthy functioning. In this chapter I contend that pleasures from taste, sex, sound, etc., are painless in themselves and are therefore katastematic; no matter whether they occur in the midst of pain (such as when we enjoy tasty food when hungry) or are isolated from pain (when we enjoy dessert after

filling up on dinner), they are perceptions of the painless workings of the organism.

I don't write this to encourage us to spend more time looking for classical scholars to take sides with on the meaning of *kinetic* and *katastametic*. Nor should we throw up our hands and conclude that Epicurean philosophy is hopeless because we've lost so many texts. The right way forward for virtually everyone is to focus on the basics as it is clear that Lucretius, Diogenes of Oinoanda, Diogenes Laertius, and the general ancient world understood him. And it seems clear that *they* saw Epicurus as embracing pleasures of *both* types - pleasures of action or pleasures of state or *whatever* those words mean - and choosing among those pleasures by applying a common sense analysis of whether they will bring us more pleasure or more pain.

Post by “Pacatus” of July 17, 2026 at 9:16 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

embracing pleasures of both types - pleasures of action or pleasures of state or whatever those words mean - and choosing among those pleasures by applying a common sense analysis of whether they will bring us more pleasure or more pain.

This seems to me to be a balanced and common-sense approach.

I didn't read the policy thread as forbidding any and all discussion of kinetic/katastematic pleasure (or aponia/atarxia). They've been battled around on here since I've been here - often helpfully.

But it seems as if the various arguments (using that word in a technical, not a pejorative sense) about trying to parse strict distinctions are unlikely to ever be settled to any general satisfaction.

But pleasure (broadly construed) as the guiding foundation - as opposed to, say, only *ataraxia* for the Pyrrhonians - and a common sense estimation of pleasure/pain outcomes, is settled (for Epicureans). And feelings of satisfaction or contentment are just also pleasures (and, perhaps contra Aronsen, as you've quoted her, I think the Cyrenaics would have seen them as “kinetic” as well).

As for duration: Is taking the time to enjoy the pleasure of tasting good food (instead of scarfing it down) necessarily of less duration than moments of satisfaction in between bites? Or perhaps a few moments of contentment after a meal - before delving into that novel you've been reading? And then perhaps taking a bit of time to rest your eyes between chapters? I suspect it's all rather fluid - and that attempts to decide some relative “superiority” are generally

misguided (e.g., the Cyrenaics on the one hand, and the Pyrrhonians on the other – Epicurus seems more balanced).

Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2026 at 10:29 AM

Pacatus i think your post does a good job of summarizing where we need to be.

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

I didn't read the policy thread as forbidding any and all discussion of kinetic/katastematic pleasure (or aponia/ataraxia). They've been batted around on here since I've been here – often helpfully.

Correct. These terms and questions can be discussed without advocacy of the opposing position, and the very existence of the controversy is an "elephant in the room" that cannot be made to go away by ignoring it. I expect to write many additional posts and articles that address the issue from the "pleasure is the supreme good / pleasure is a very wide concept perspective, and I hope others will too. We can also have "private" discussions that do not affect the publicly-viewable flow of the site and distract from its central message.

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

But it seems as if the various arguments (using that word in a technical, not a pejorative sense) about trying to parse strict distinctions are unlikely to ever be settled to any general satisfaction.

And that is probably the most important point. There will never be universal agreement on these points, even among those of us who devote extensive time to reading about Epicurus. In my own mind I come back over and over to the scenes in the "Agora" movie about Hypatia, where the Platonic-like philosophers were consumed in their disputes about astronomy and geometry while their world was collapsing around them outside their doors. There's a time and a place for everything, but these are not the times nor is this the place to allow the focus of the site to be distracted away from central issues.

I don't think anyone on this website is an ascetic or even a minimalist at heart or views "pleasure" or even "desire" with suspicion. And yet those attitudes and perspectives have embedded themselves into Epicurean discourse, largely through this dispute that somehow "katastematic" pleasure is superior and different to pleasure itself.

I haven't recently referenced Elayne's article from 2019 but it continues to be a good non-technical discussion of the issues:



Blog Article

[On Pain, Pleasure, and Happiness](#)

Not "absence of pain" as a full statement of the goal of life, but "the Feelings are two, pleasure and pain" and "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of a happy life."

Brief: The feelings are only two, pleasure and pain—there is no third state such as neutral, and there are no “fancy pleasures” which are different from regular pleasures. Because there is no neutral, reducing pain in life is only possible if there is a corresponding increase in pleasure. The extent of pleasure can be...

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/5179-discussion-of-the-thread-against-katastematic-supremacy-pleasure-is-a-unified-wh/>

Elayne
July 15, 2019 at 7:31 PM

Post by “DaveT” of July 17, 2026 at 11:45 AM

[Cassius](#) [Pacatus](#) I suppose I above posted more for my personal application of Epicurus' doctrines to my everyday life. My life observations myself, and of other people are the source of the questions I raised.

I have no quarrel with the Forum's guidelines as [Cassius](#) formulated them. I believe you both implied, the way we adopt and apply the doctrines for ourselves is always a matter of choice based on our own ability to independently reason out our lifestyle choices.

Respecting the man, and Epicurus' mind, is what the Forum is dedicated to, right? I usually enjoy all the posts, and have no ax to grind, in either direction when it comes to interpreting or commenting on Epicurus. Always the student, me.

Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2026 at 12:37 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Respecting the man, and Epicurus' mind, is what the Forum is dedicated to, right

That's one way of looking at it, maybe like there is more than one way to view pleasure.

Yes if we respect Epicurus' mind and person, as Lucretius did for example, that's a good guardrail. But just like Epicurus himself as a real person, we all have to live day to day and focus on the most important issues, just as he wrote in the letter to Herodotus about not always needing to know the details but always returning to the headings.

So I would say the real idea is to focus more on the importance of the core ideas which are needed all the time (true views of gods, death, pleasure as the goal, pain as manageable) and only after those are firmly established as the organizational principles would we be prudent to be spending much time on secondary issues.

Of course its tricky - advocacy that Epicurus had a goal other than pleasure is not a secondary issue at all. That takes us back to Pacatus' observation that we will never have consensus on some things. If we are going to build content and community on the view that pleasure is the goal, there has to be a limit on advocacy that undercuts that.

Post by “Pacatus” of July 17, 2026 at 12:51 PM

[Cassius:](#)

Many thanks for posting that essay by Elayne! I read it some years back, but what a pleasure to reread it – and a great reminder! (I actually just put the link on my wall as a reminder.) 😊

Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2026 at 1:27 PM

Dave's questions and this thread have me constructively focusing on the issue of what IS really important to focus on. I'm working on some new thoughts for articles about the general issue of the public perception of what "hedonism" means and how much of a problem that word can be.

I was watching a short clip this morning of someone who was mad about an issue and he concluded by accusing his opponents of being "greedy" and essentially focusing on their own pleasures of the moment to the exclusion of concern about future generations. Whether he was right or wrong on the particular issue isn't nearly as important as the fact that he specifically called his opponents "hedonists" as if there is no other possible meaning of the word beyond a narrow focus on the immediate bodily-pleasures-of-the-moment.

1. Is it worth anyone's time to write material trying to rehabilitate the word hedonism?
2. Does it make more sense just to explain that that's not what Epicurus was about?
3. Why is it in fact so hard for people to weigh the pleasures of the moment against the pains that are sure to follow? Aren't there ways to work on improving that situation without talking as if pleasure and desire should be entirely abandoned?

I tend to think that one of the most effective lines of argument is to look to the actual lives of the ancient Epicureans to see how *they* implemented the philosophy. The contents of Epicurus' will and his last letter are extremely helpful in putting to rest any ambiguities because we can see how Epicurus himself lived his philosophy.

Many of us here and I am one of them love to spend time digging into the details of the surviving fragments to glean more out of them, but can I say that I really have time to do that given that I can't seem to eat right and exercise enough and already have a clear focus on the balance of short and long term and greater and lesser pleasures and pains? No, I can't say that I've come nearly far enough on the basics, and spending too much time on nonessential details may in my case at least be a way of procrastination from what really needs to be done.

So there's all sorts of things that need to be addressed, not only in others but in ourselves. And a time and a proper way to say everything - even *denouncing with righteous indignation* those who are so blinded by desire that they choose a lesser but immediate pleasure that will cost them a future but much greater pain.

Quote from Torquatus On Ends 1:33

On the other hand, we denounce with righteous indignation and dislike men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of the pleasure of the moment, so blinded by desire, that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to ensue; and equal blame belongs to those who fail in their duty through weakness of will, which is the same as saying through shrinking from toil and pain.

Post by “Pacatus” of July 17, 2026 at 2:04 PM

[Cassius](#):

I don't know if that word **pleasure** (and *pain* as well) scares people. Or if some adverse reaction stems from years of social enculturation and “programming” (e.g., from family, religion, education).^{*} Or if they just don't understand the breadth of Epicurus' application of those terms. Or maybe some people (especially in academia) feel easier parsing the Greek and Latin, almost as a deflection from “*that word*.”^{**} (I recall Emily Austin having to battle with her publisher to get the word in the title of her book. And her introductory chapter on what pleasure is, is excellent.)

Maybe it just takes repetition, and that repetition coming at it from slightly different angles – I think that has been the case for me. And why I go back to reread such as Austin – I've read it all twice now (some things thrice), and will likely do so again. I still need that repetition at the basic level; maybe I get a slightly different “angle” on it each time. A process of absorption.

I doubt there are any “magic answers.” And I doubt – given the power and ubiquity of that aforementioned enculturation – we'll ever be as popular as the Stoics.

Just my ramblings on the questions you raise. Just keep doin' the good work. 👍

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\* I had to struggle with that a bit too, even though I had “intellectually” seen through at least most of it. Being here helped with that immensely (even if I’m a slow learner – or just innately stubborn 😞).

\*\* I want to be very, very clear that I see none of the longstanding members here, who do deep research, do it for that reason! It, too, can be a pleasure – as well as valuable for all of us.

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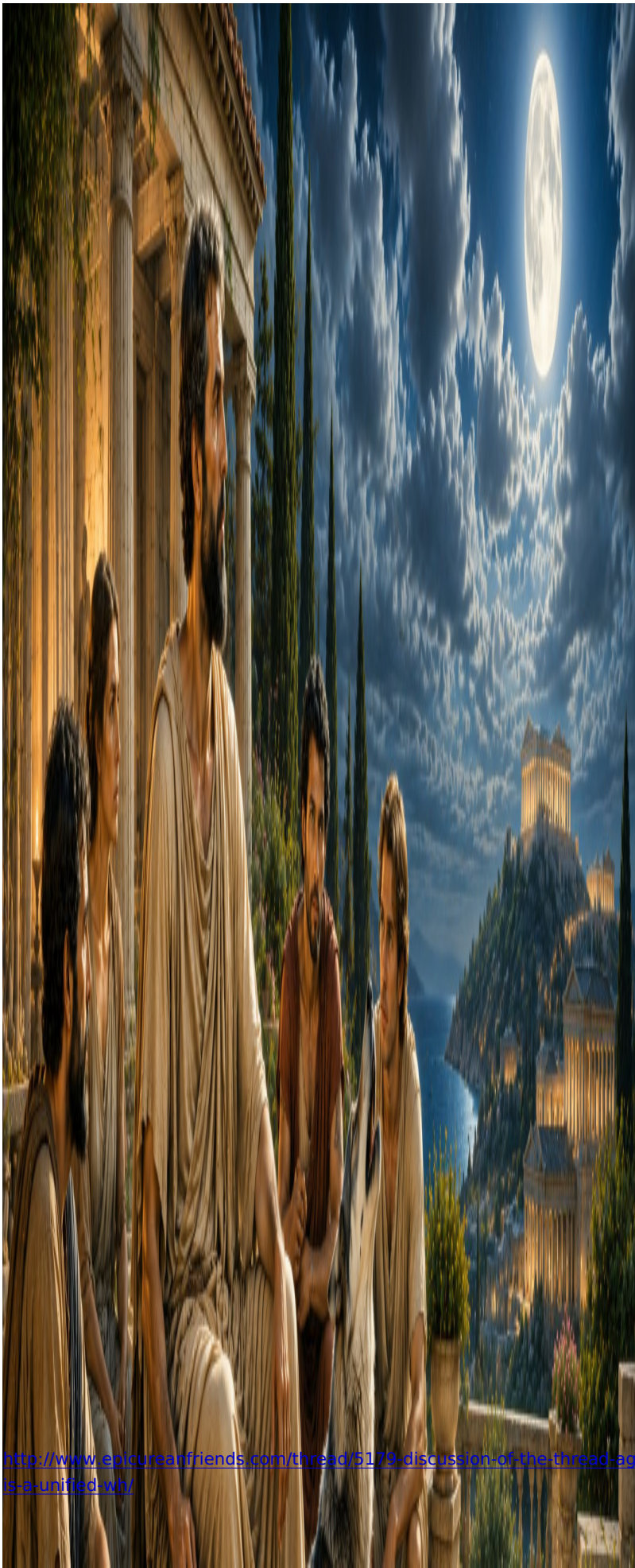
### Post by “Cassius” of July 17, 2026 at 3:19 PM

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

don't know if that word pleasure (and pain as well) scares people.

There's absolutely no doubt --most people are scared to death of the term, and they would never want to be associated with a *philosophy* of pleasure - *especially* in Academia.

Since there's a lot of criticism of negativity embedded in this discussion I thought I better draft something as an example of what I personally think is a more positive approach to Epicurus. Nothing that people here haven't seen a hundred times before, but again that's the point - we are the tiny minority, and I don't think we should sit back and make no effort to change that by talking about the core issues - WITHOUT lathering it with apologies for pleasure, with appeals to asceticism, minimalism, resignation, withdrawal, or the like. Posting this mainly for X, Facebook, Substack, etc.



<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/5179-discussion-of-the-thread-against-katastematic-supremacy-pleasure-is-a-united-war/>

Blog Article

## [Living For The Pleasures Of The Moment Isn't Epicurean — It's Lunacy: Why the World's Most Famous "Hedonist" Would Have Despised What We Call Hedonism](#)

### **The Passage You've Seen a Thousand Times, and What It Actually Says**

You have almost certainly seen this sentence before, even if you've never read a word of it: "*Neque porro quisquam est, qui dolorem ipsum, quia dolor sit, amet, consectetur, adipisci velit...*" It's the source of "Lorem Ipsum" -- the scrambled placeholder text that has filled empty design mockups and dummy web pages for decades. Almost nobody who has typed it, pasted it, or stared at it while waiting for real content ever learns...



Cassius

July 17, 2026 at 3:05 PM