

An Unfortunate Article Suggesting That Katastematic Pleasure is "Necessary" and Kinetic Pleasure is "Unnecessary"

Post by "Cassius" of April 14, 2021 at 4:15 PM

Well it would probably be worth some of us doing it at some point, since this is such a recurring issue, and that's why I posted it so we could add to the "database." But I totally agree that we have a lot more important things to do.

I think maybe the most important use for something like this is to be able to cite it as an example of what this slippery slope leads to, because it takes a while before you see the end game.

A LOT of people get exposed to this paradigm as their first exposure to Epicurus:

(1) Epicurus said the goal of life is pleasure, but

(2) Epicurus redefined pleasure as absence of pain.

(3) That redefinition really doesn't make sense, so there must be some brilliant insight behind it we'd better go looking for.

(4) The brilliant insight is alleged to be that there is a really important difference between katastematic/kinetic pleasure. (And at this step it's really more effective for the proponent to leave katastematic/kinetic untranslated, rather than call it static/active, because the Greek words are much sexier, and the mystery makes the assertion much easier to swallow.)

(5) Calling the ultimate good a "resting" pleasure ("katastematic"! "ataraxia"!) sort of brings back the discussion into the realm of the intelligible, because even though these words are very ambiguous in themselves, and they contradict everyday conceptions of what pleasure is all about, "everyone knows" the major Greek philosophers were into "reason" and "thinking" and "the mind" rather than coarse and ignoble things like having fun and being active and experiencing joy and delight.

(6) So we arrive at the point intended by these proponents: Epicurus was really ahead of his time, and he was advocating asceticism, but his word-play needed to be straightened out by the Stoics, who identified that the kind of resting pleasure that we all need is the contemplation of virtue and the divine fire, in and of itself, and for no reward other than itself.

(7) And thus we see that Epicurus blends nicely into the mainstream of Greek thought, and we can put his books safely back on the shelf, content that we fully understand everything of significance Epicurus had to say.

[I hope my sarcasm or feeble attempt at humor in these steps is apparent, but just in case I'll add this note to make it clear. This analysis flies in the face of what I believe Epicurean philosophy to be all about, and it serves as a tremendous obstacle to the wider understanding and acceptance of Epicurean philosophy. I am 100% convinced that if the ancients had understood Epicurus to have been teaching this kind of analysis, Epicurean philosophy would never have seen widespread adoption, and the name of Epicurus would have been lost to history a long time ago.]