

# Differences between Epicureanism and Cyrenaicism

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2021 at 10:55 PM

OK I have re-read the Wenham Article ("On Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure") and I do need to correct what I said above:

I now remember why I find Wenham's article useful, but not in the way of Gosling & Taylor and [Nikolsky](#).

The key point of departure in Wenham is that when Wenham is forced to decide whether Cicero (1) misrepresented Epicurus or (2) misunderstood Epicurus, Wenham departs from G&T and decides to go easy on Cicero and accuse him of incompetence rather than malevolence. Here's the key part of Wenham's case. Cicero is wrong, but the question is WHY.

How, then, to show that the standard interpretation is mistaken? There are two ways to go. Firstly, we might extend our challenge to Cicero's credibility as an expositor of Epicureanism by appeal to factors that bear indirectly on his interpretation. For instance, we might suggest that Cicero's polemic intent in book two of *De Finibus* so biased his interpretation in book one that the latter cannot be trusted — we

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might, that is, say that book one is a setup. Alternatively, we might try to show that Cicero's interpretation of Epicurus conflicts with the other uncontested aspects of the Epicurean system to such an extent that it is improbable that Cicero is correct. In their work, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (1983), Gosling and Taylor make one of the few challenges to the standard interpretation by way of the first of the above methods (pp. 345–413). I have neither the space nor the expertise to attempt anything similar here. Nevertheless, I think a more effective objection to the standard interpretation can be mounted using the alternative method. Namely, I think the standard interpretation of *katastematic* pleasure can be shown to conflict with clearly established, and widely agreed upon aspects of Epicurean epistemology.

... And so Wenham decides that Cicero simply must be wrong. The rest of the article gives his reasoning, which is where my memory was bad. Wenham says (I think rightly) that Epicurus held that pleasure is pleasure because it can be experienced, and so Wenham concludes that whatever *katastematic* pleasure it, is must be felt / experienced just like kinetic pleasure.

Maybe you'll read the article differently than I do, but where does that leave Wenham in describing what *katastematic* pleasure must mean (under this theory)? I've read over the article several times, and I think he's left right where we would expect. He can't and doesn't even try to define *katastematic* pleasure as separate from kinetic. All he does is conclude that

whatever it is, it must be "experienced" or "felt" because that's the way Epicurus looked at pleasure.

So as I read it this article would implicitly support Don's current position, but I say that still convinced that the reason Wenham stops where he does is that he doesn't follow Gosling & Taylor to the logical conclusion that [Nikolsky](#) took them. Wenham chooses to believe that despite Cicero's sweeping knowledge, access to the Epicurean friends and teachers, and Cicero's own training in Epicurean philosophy, that Cicero simply "misunderstood" what Epicurus was saying.

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MARY N. PORTER PACKER. Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Ethics. New York, The Columbia University Press, 1938. Pp. 127. Columbia Diss.

This study is most commendable. It is clearly written and well printed, acutely reasoned and amply documented. The treatment confines itself to *De Finibus* I-II and is divided into two chapters: 1. Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Philosophy in *De Finibus* I. 2. Cicero's Critique of Epicurean Philosophy, Presented in *De Finibus* I and II. Each chapter concludes with a summary, and the text of Epicurus himself is abundantly cited. The conclusion is that Cicero failed "to understand Epicureanism as a consistently unified philosophy (p. 81)," but is acquitted of having been "deliberately and intentionally unfair (p. 119)."

It is only to this acquittal that I take exception. Every debater has the choice of arguing to reveal the truth in its entirety or of arguing to make points. The former method is adapted to the Supreme Court, the latter to a trial by jury. Cicero was a crafty old trial lawyer and he deliberately argued to make points, because he was pleading before a reading audience, which functions like a jury, and his shrewd legal mind had long discerned the vulnerability of Epicureanism before this style of attack. His attitude was that of William J. Bryan toward biological evolution, and his pleadings are comparable to a Scopes trial, but I do not believe he could have misrepresented the truth so successfully had he not understood it completely. In the Scopes trial, the crafty old lawyer was on the opposite side—Clarence Darrow.

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