

# **Episode 167 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 20 - Chapter 9 - The New Physics 02**

**Post by "Cassius" of March 28, 2023 at 7:56 AM**

That Sedley article I just linked looks like a very good basic text on Epicurus:

<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/epicureanism/v-1>

However in pointing to it I see that Sedley includes a stark version of the conclusion that I think is most damaging to all who don't dig deeper - he carries the modern kinetic/katastematic interpretation trend to its logical conclusion - that "THE PRIMARY AIM SHOULD BE THE MINIMIZATION OF PAIN."

He writes that statement even though he started the same paragraph by writing "IN ETHICS, PLEASURE IS THE ONE GOOD AND OUR INNATELY SOUGHT GOAL, TO WHICH ALL OTHER VALUES ARE SUBORDINATED."

In ethics, pleasure is the one good and our innately sought goal, to which all other values are subordinated. Pain is the only bad, and there is no intermediate state. Bodily pleasure becomes more secure if we adopt a simple lifestyle which satisfies only our natural and necessary desires, with the support of like-minded friends. Bodily pain, when inevitable, can be outweighed by mental pleasure, which exceeds it because it can range over past, present and future enjoyments. The highest pleasure, whether of soul or of body, is a satisfied state, 'static pleasure'. The short-term ('kinetic') pleasures of stimulation can vary this state, but cannot make it more pleasant. In striving to accumulate such pleasures, you run the risk of becoming dependent on them and thus needlessly vulnerable to fortune. The primary aim should instead be the minimization of pain. This is achieved for the body through a simple lifestyle, and for the soul through the study of physics, which offers the most prized 'static' pleasure, 'freedom from disturbance' (*ataraxia*), by eliminating the two main sources of human anguish, the fears of god and of death. It teaches us that cosmic phenomena do not convey divine threats, and that death is mere disintegration of the soul, with hell an illusion. Being dead will be no worse than not having yet been born. Physics also teaches us how to evade determinism, which would turn moral agents into mindless fatalists: the indeterministic 'swerve' doctrine (see above), along with the logical doctrine that future-tensed propositions may be neither true nor false, leaves the will free.

This is very unfortunate terminology. The first underlined sentence is explicitly stated in Epicurus and is beyond doubt Epicurus' ultimate viewpoint. The second statement is not explicitly stated in Epicurus, and that formulation is an inference drawn largely from Cicero and the kinetic-katestematic controversy that we've discussed extensively elsewhere (for new readers see Boris [Nikolsky](#)'s "Epicurus On Pleasure" which derives from Gosling and Taylor.

On this I think Emily Austin's viewpoint in her footnote in Chapter 4 of Living for Pleasure is very helpful:

8. This is a non-specialist text, so I have chosen not to wade into the dispute about katestematic and kinetic pleasures in the body of the text. A specialist will recognize that I am adopting a view roughly in line with [Gosling and Taylor \(1982\)](#) and [Arenson \(2019\)](#). On my reading, katestematic pleasures are sensory pleasures that issue from confidence in one's ability to satisfy one's necessary desires and an awareness of one's healthy psychological functioning; choice-worthy kinetic pleasures are the various pleasures consistent with maintaining healthy functioning, and those pleasures vary, but do not increase healthy psychological functioning.

Both cite [Gosling & Taylor](#) who have probably the most extensive analysis.

19.0.4. The kind of view we wish to oppose holds that it was an important feature of Epicureanism to insist on dividing pleasures into two sorts, sensory ones on the one hand, and katastematic ones, of which lack of disturbance of mind (*ataraxia*) and lack of pain (*aponia*) are the important examples, on the other. The distinction was important to Epicurus because it was the latter which he wished to put forward as the good in life, and he needed the contrast in order to defend himself against the charge that he was advocating a life of debauchery. He can be seen doing this in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (DL X.131-2) where he says that when we call pleasure the goal we do not mean the pleasures of profligates, but to be without pain of body or distress of mind. The pleasures of profligates are obviously the sensory pleasures, and Epicurus is making it clear that he is putting forward something else as our goal. There are four objections which such views have to meet (see 19.0.6-9).

19.0.6. As we have pointed out, all these views assume that the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasures was one on which Epicurus put a particular emphasis, and that they were different kinds of pleasure, the good in life consisting in some of the latter. It is this feature of all such views which creates the problems. These are as follows:

19.1.2. The passages quoted by Cicero in *Tusculan Disputations* (cf. 19.0.6) suggest a different picture of *aponia* and *ataraxia* whereby *aponia* is a condition of having sensory pleasures but with no accompanying pain, and *ataraxia* is a state of confidence that one may acquire such sensory pleasures with complete absence of pain. This confidence is itself a positive state. However unadulterated by