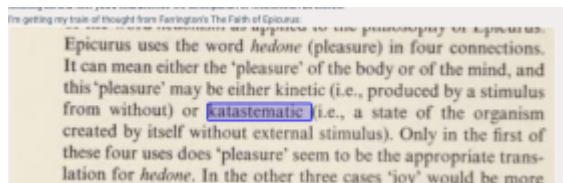


# Modern Neuroscience And The Katastematic / Kinetic Debate

Post by "Cassius" of June 30, 2023 at 5:09 PM

Don:

I glanced back at the Gosling and Taylor treatment in "The Greeks on Pleasure" and I don't see at first glance any mention of a distinction between "produced by stimulus from without" or "created by itself without external stimulus." So I suppose the question then would be - What evidence does Farrington use to support his contention that this distinction of "produced by stimulus from without" vs "created by itself without outside stimulus" is a distinguishing factor of kinetic vs katastematic?



is getting my train of thought from Farrington's The Faith of Epicurus.

Epicurus uses the word *hedone* (pleasure) in four connections. It can mean either the 'pleasure' of the body or of the mind, and this 'pleasure' may be either kinetic (i.e., produced by a stimulus from without) or **katastematic** (i.e., a state of the organism created by itself without external stimulus). Only in the first of these four uses does 'pleasure' seem to be the appropriate translation for *hedone*. In the other three cases 'joy' would be more

For example, as Gosling and Taylor come to their conclusion, I see no distinction being made about outside vs self-generated, but rather they are focusing on perception, which might be perception of something from either class:

claim to reliability. Apart from that we either have passages which are no evidence at all, passages where the author might well be fathering his own conception of the kinetic on Epicurus, and a fragment of Epicurus on which the most favourable interpretation makes all experiences of pleasure kinetic, and so, by implication, sensory pleasures, but which might also be saying nothing about kinetic pleasure at all but rather making the point that *ataraxia* and *aponia* are not just negative states, but the experiences of *chara* and *euphrosunē*. In addition the evidence of both Lucretius and Plutarch supports our view that 'pure sensory pleasure' and '*aponia*' 'joy' and '*ataraxia*' are four names for two conditions. The main argument for doubting Cicero and one possible reading of DL X.136 is that both suppose a view of katastematic pleasure and the good which makes it hard to see how it could be appreciated in perception, since any perception-

pleasure is kinetic. This is acknowledged by Rist ((2), p. 102) when he says that the experience of katastematic pleasure consists in gentle motions of atoms, so that the difference between the two pleasures comes down to a difference between the steadiness and endurance of the motions. The more one stresses this the less important the distinction comes to look, since any condition, however steady, of a living thing, must according to Epicurus, be a condition of perceiving: but there is no evidence of a special kind of perceiving or object of perception to constitute *ataraxia* and *aponia*. Consequently we should be left with steady long-lasting perceptions over against fleeting ones. It seems simplest just to suppose that when the organism is functioning harmoniously it is always having some form of perception; that since the operation is harmonious the perception is pleasant and without pain; and that is just what *aponia* is. *Ataraxia* is the condition when, because of correct views, our expectations are undisturbed by fear, our desires do not pursue empty objectives and our memories are pleasant: this leaves us to enjoy our pleasures unanxiously.

is hard to believe that he would have been unaware of claims about a neutral state, or the possible charge that his ideal was indistinguishable from *apatheia*. So he would probably have a positive account of *katastematic* pleasure. It is probable that 'kinetic' would at that period suggest a view of process towards a state, and he would need to claim other pleasures than that. The interpretation has him do this in a way readily available after Aristotle's defence of Eudoxus, but adapting that way to his own preferred account not in terms of the actualization of capacities, but of the balance of nature, adopting a Platonic, not Aristotelian, criterion of relative pleasantness. It is an interpretation which has the best chance of allowing him to make perception the criterion of the good, and of allowing him to make strong claims about sensory pleasure without playing fast and loose on the nature of pleasure. While it has to be acknowledged that it flies in the face of Cicero, it needs emphasizing once more that Cicero's

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interpretation stands in need of defence: it is not supported by extant writings of Epicurus, and attributes views to him which ought to be surprising. Its main support comes from equally unsympathetic and so suspect interpreters. All are interestingly baffled by the apparent inconsistency between eulogizing sensory pleasures and so, presumably, unbridled sensuality, while advocating a life of simple asceticism and lack of disturbance. Perhaps the Epicurean complaint of persistent misunderstanding was justified (cf. Cicero *Fin.* II. iv.12).

Do you know the basis of Farrington's reasoning? The bringing into a state you are referring to could be either perception of something from outside, or thoughts of understanding generated by oneself through true philosophy, could it not?