

Episode 196 - The Epicurean Arguments In Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 06

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Chapter 19

Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures

19.0.1. Notoriously, Epicurus considered pleasure to be the good and by that primarily meant that *ataraxia/aponia* was the good. While he allowed of other, kinetic pleasures, these katastematic ones take pride of place. The highest pleasure and greatest good is to be without pain or disturbance, and it is this condition at which all living things naturally aim. It has usually been taken as fairly unproblematic which pleasures are kinetic. All sensory pleasures fall into this category and perhaps some mental ones such as learning. This determines Usener's selection of passages, and it tends to be a point of agreement among commentators who disagree about the nature of katastematic pleasure and its relation to kinetic. Thus Diano, and after him Rist,¹ argue that every kinetic pleasure presupposes the presence of a katastematic one, since any sensory pleasure requires the good, and therefore painless, condition of at least part of the organ in question, and that is another way of saying that there is prior katastematic pleasure in the organ. On the other side Merlan argues for a more positive view of katastematic pleasure, considering it the state of joy of a being free of pain and anxiety. But he agrees that all sensory pleasures are kinetic.

19.0.2. With the nature of kinetic pleasures thus agreed, the point of dispute becomes just how Epicurus thought of katastematic pleasures, and why he used the same word for both kinds. The Diano/Rist position makes katastematic pleasure in danger of being the negative condition of lacking pain or anxiety, and this makes one wonder why Epicurus was not content to join those mentioned by Aristotle (*EN* 1104b24) who thought the best condition one of *apatheia*. On the Merlan view it becomes slightly more intelligible why

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he should not take this route, but still a question why he did not make his point by reserving some word especially for his *summum bonum* and contrasting it with kinetic pleasure. Yet so far is he from doing this that he claims he doesn't know what he could conceive the good to consist in if one takes away sensory pleasure (fr. 10 = U 67), although the good is apparently katastematic pleasure. In general these interpreters feel the pull of the difficulty developed by Cicero, in *de Finibus* I and II, that Epicurus seems to be using the same word confusingly for significantly different and unrelated phenomena.

19.0.3. To begin with we shall try to bring out how any view which sees kinetic pleasures as comprising at least the sensory ones, and as constituting a distinct class from katastematic ones, involves attributing an awkward view to Epicurus. We shall then outline our own interpretation indicating how it meets this difficulty. Only then shall we systematically consider the evidence.

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).

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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:

(i) It is agreed on all these views that the good is *ataraxia* and *aponia*, as distinct from sensory pleasures. But Epicurus is very insistent on the importance of sensory pleasures. This

368

Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures

19.0.6

is most obvious in two quotations given by Cicero (*Tusc.* III. xviii.41-2):

not saying that all sensory pleasures are painless, although we are saying that *aponia* is a condition of having painless sensory pleasures. The question that one has to ask is what force Epicurus might have given to the terms 'katastematic' and 'kinetic'. The word 'katastematic' is an adjective from the noun '*katastēma*', and we know (cf. Plut. *Non Posse* 1089d = U 68) that one Epicurean expression for *aponia* was 'the well-established *katastēma* (condition) of the flesh'. One might therefore expect that katastematic pleasure is pleasure of the organism in proper condition. We also know (cf. 8.2, 15.1, Appendix B) that during the fourth century, and in many cases associated with the Academy, there had been various analyses of pleasure which had portrayed it as a *genesis*, a replenishment, a movement, or a *katastasis eis phusin* (restoration to the natural state). The purpose of many of these views had been to show that pleasure could not be the good since it was a movement aimed at an end term, and it is the end term that must be the good. Clearly

anyone wishing, like Epicurus, to hold that pleasure is the good, might feel the need, against such views, still in evidence when the *Magna Moralia* was written, to assert that in addition to such kinetic pleasures (pleasures of movement) there are pleasures of the *katastēma*. Indeed, if our view is correct, Epicurus, perhaps taking a hint from Aristotle, seems to have held that when the organism is operating properly it will be in a state of pleasure, and pain is a matter of unnatural operation. This, note, is a view about the organism, not individual organs. At any time a properly functioning