

# Welcome Philosofer123!

Post by "Cassius" of May 3, 2019 at 7:00 AM

The short answer to the question is "No." That passage is not a description of "katastematic pleasure," whatever that is, because that term is not used by Epicurus. It is a combination of two things (1) the core position that because pleasure is the goal, we should not choose pleasures which bring more pain than they are worth, and (2) the core position that since all human experience is either pleasure or pain, the most desirable human experience is that which is "crammed full of pleasures" and from which all pains have thereby been crowded out and are absent.

The long answer is that given the monolithic acceptance of the Stoic-lite viewpoint in the literature of the last several hundred years, you aren't likely to accept the short answer unless you dig into the details presented in the articles I mention. Those articles cite the background in which the letter to Menoeceus was written, and the subsequent philosophic wars in which the K/K distinction was pushed.

The key aspect of the background of the letter was the philosophic war with Platonists as to whether Pleasure has a limit of quantity, found in [Philebus](#), and Epicurus' response that the limit of pleasure is when experience is filled with nothing but pleasures. That is the meaning of PD3 as well, where the context of **quantity** is stated explicitly.

The key aspect of the subsequent philosophic war where the K/K distinction was considered important is traced by [Nikolsky](#) in his article where he cites the Division of Carneades for pushing this viewpoint. And you will see that the same "ordinary pleasures" conclusion is reached when you read the much more detailed treatment by Gosling and Taylor in *The Greeks on Pleasure*.

In addition, there is no evidence that Epicurus himself used the K/K distinction. The only time it is referenced in the bio of Diogenes Laertius (written hundreds of years after Epicurus) DL states that Epicurus endorsed \*both\* types. And many references in the other surviving texts show that Epicurean theory turns on the embrace of the experience of pleasure as ordinary people interpret it, not in setting up a new term ("katastematic" or "absence of pain") as some kind of mysterious new definition of pleasure as the goal of life. The bottom line is that Epicurus taught pleasure as we ordinarily understand it, including all forms of bodily and mental pleasures. If it is pleasure, it feels like pleasure, and anything which feels like pleasure is a part of the ordinary analysis of all experience being either pleasurable or painful.

I have collected the references in support of this analysis here:  
<https://newepicurean.com/foundations-2/...pleasure-model/>

I grant you that the position I am arguing is not the mainstream viewpoint. But it is also not something that I dreamed up myself, and it is supported by the authorities that I collect at the link above. As cited at my link, to research this issue, start with [Boris Nikolsky's "Epicurus on Pleasure,"](#) which argues that the katastematic issue was not introduced by Epicurus and reflects a later Stoic-influenced viewpoint. Next, read the chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure,"](#) from which [Nikolsky](#) got the inspiration for his article. Add to that the Wentham article ["Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure,"](#) which highlights how emphasis on katastematic pleasure contradicts other core aspects of Epicurean philosophy.

I'll close this post with two clearly-documented references that I believe to be totally irreconcilable with any idea that Epicurus pushed "absence of pain" as anything other than a statement of quantity. The statement of quantity is itself critically important as a refutation of the "no limit" argument, but it is not a description of the pleasures being experienced in the best life:

***It is observed too that in his treatise On the Ethical End he [Epicurus] writes in these terms:***

***"I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, of sex, of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form."***

***- Diogenes Laertius, Book X***

***"He {Publius Clodius} praised those most who are said to be above all others the teachers and eulogists of pleasure {the Epicureans}. ... He added that these same men were quite right in saying that the wise do everything for their own interests; that no sane man should engage in public affairs; that nothing was preferable to a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures.***

***- Cicero, In Defense of Publius Sestius 10.23***