

VS11 - VS11 and Kinetic / Katastematic Pleasure

Post by "Hiram" of February 5, 2020 at 9:59 AM

Quote

For most men rest is stagnation and activity is madness. - Epicurean Saying 11

I think it was Laertius who explained that the argument of how pleasure exists in both katastematic and kinetic forms (static and dynamic) is because Epicurus was critiquing the Cyrenaics, who believed that pleasure could only exist in the satisfaction of the senses here and now. Aristippus of Cyrene told people to practice "presentism", to be present to the pleasures of the immediacy. Epicurus, instead, told people that they could also reminisce about past ones and anticipate future pleasures.

Diogenes of Oenoanda elaborates on these arguments.

And I know that some of the modern Epicureans find this idea of kinetic/katastematic pleasures controversial, and I know Cassius has said that he believes these categories are not found in Epicurus' extant writings. We have [record of a past dialogue here](#).

But we never considered this saying in discussing that. I think VS 11 does seem to name a problem that is being addressed by the kinetic/katastematic categories of pleasures, and I wonder if these Sayings can be traced back to the founders.

VS 11 seems to be implying that philosophers should educate themselves to experience rest as pleasure rather than stagnation / ennui / boredom, and to experience action as pleasure rather than madness / stress.

Post by "Cassius" of February 5, 2020 at 10:34 AM

Interesting question; here are my comments:

(1) For reference, the definitive disassembly of the katastematic/kinetic assertion is [Boris Nikolsky's "Epicurus on Pleasure"](#) (abstract below)

(2) I am not sure I really understand why you would take the phrase in the direction you are taking it: "VS 11 seems to be implying that philosophers should educate themselves to

experience rest as pleasure rather than stagnation / ennui / boredom, and to experience action as pleasure rather than madness / stress."

Why not simply take it at face value? Which is something like "most people do not intelligently use either their periods of rest or their periods of activity in a way that maximizes their pleasure."

So maybe the way to pursue the question would be "In what way do the kinetic/katastematic categories relate to or help resolve the imprudent use of time?"

It seems to me that the main way in which the kinetic/katastematic distinction is used by those who promote them is to argue that "katastematic" (rest) pleasures are superior to pleasures of action. In fact the argument often goes so far as to allege that we should dispense entirely with pleasures of action, and that pleasures of action are only needed in order to bring about conditions satisfactory for the so-called "katastematic" pleasure. Those assertions seem to me to be both (1) incorrect, and (2) not at all what [VS11](#) is saying, which is that most men would profit from more intelligent pursuit of BOTH action and rest.

So to restate that, if [VS11](#) were intended as a statement of endorsement of the katastematic/kinetic distinction that some what to promote, it fails to promote that because it does not promote rest over action (it considers them equally).

It is probably presumable that Epicurus was aware that some philosophers were debating issues of rest and action long before his own time, as traced in the background given by Gosling & Taylor in their "Greeks on Pleasure." So in considering rest and action equally, if [VS11](#) relates to the katastematic/kinetic distinction at all, it supports the argument of [Nikolsky](#) that the categories were largely irrelevant to Epicurus, and Epicurus never intended to promote one type of pleasure over the other. In fact, viewed that way, the most likely use of [VS11](#) as written is to emphasize the **equality** of pleasures from rest and pleasures from action, not to promote pleasures of "rest" as superior.

In fact it's probably easier to construe this as an "attack on" or an "undermining of" the distinction than it is to use the reference in support of it. So from that point of view, maybe [VS11](#) IS relevant to the katastematic/kinetic distinction.

And finally, asked another way, is there really any purpose in discussing katastematic/kinetic distinctions other than as a way to promote "pleasures of rest" as superior to any other kind? I really can't think of any other purpose behind the distinction, and that seems to be how it developed and how it is used both then and now. And since elevation of one type of pleasure as intrinsically superior to other types of pleasure would violate core Epicurean principles, I can see the possibility that the subject captured in [VS11](#) came up in an Epicurean argument against that assertion (against the assertion of katastematic pleasure as intrinsically superior).

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the question of the attribution to Epicurus of the classification of pleasures into 'kinetic' and 'static'. This classification, usually regarded as authentic, confronts us with a number of problems and contradictions. Besides, it is only mentioned in a few sources that are not the most reliable. Following Gosling and Taylor, I believe that the authenticity of the classification may be called in question.

The analysis of the ancient evidence concerning Epicurus' concept of pleasure is made according to the following principle: first, I consider the sources that do not mention the distinction between 'kinetic' and 'static' pleasures, and only then do I compare them with the other group of texts which comprises reports by Cicero, Diogenes Laertius and Athenaeus. From the former group of texts there emerges a concept of pleasure as a single and not twofold notion, while such terms as 'motion' and 'state' describe not two different phenomena but only two characteristics of the same phenomenon. On the other hand, the reports comprising the latter group appear to derive from one and the same doxographical tradition, and to be connected with the classification of ethical doctrines put forward by the Middle Academy and known as the *divisio Carneadea*. In conclusion, I argue that the idea of Epicurus' classification of pleasures is based on a misinterpretation of Epicurus' concept in Academic doxography, which tended to contrapose it to doctrines of other schools, above all to the Cyrenaics' views.

Post by "Hiram" of February 5, 2020 at 11:33 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

(2) I am not sure I really understand why you would take the phrase in the direction you are taking it: "VS 11 seems to be implying that philosophers should educate themselves to experience rest as pleasure rather than stagnation / ennui / boredom, and to experience action as pleasure rather than madness / stress."

Why not simply take it at face value? Which is something like "most people do not intelligently use either their periods of rest or their periods of activity in a way that maximizes their pleasure."

Right, but why is this an established doctrine? Why would the Epicureans make this worthy of memorization?

The saying does not say or imply that abiding pleasures are "superior" to dynamic ones, or anything of that sort. If this is being said by anyone, we should consider that a SEPARATE argument and put it in a thought bubble and address it separately, without losing the point being presented here, which is that there is a need to remedy both ethical problems.

I think VS 11 is pointing the finger at ailments / dis-eases that require medicine, and the way this ties to the teaching is that BOTH of these are problems for which philosophy has the remedy.

Post by "Hiram" of February 5, 2020 at 11:47 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And finally, asked another way, is there really any purpose in discussing katastematic/kinetic distinctions other than as a way to promote "pleasures of rest" as superior to any other kind? I really can't think of any other purpose behind the distinction, and that seems to be how it developed and how it is used both then and now. And since elevation of one type of pleasure as intrinsically superior to other types of pleasure would violate core Epicurean principles, I can see the possibility that the subject captured in [VS11](#) came up in an Epicurean argument against that assertion (against the assertion of katastematic pleasure as intrinsically superior).

I really don't think that the author of the Vatican Sayings made the argument that one is equal or superior to the other. You're jumping over the discussion, and questioning why this should even be in the doctrines.

VS 11 is there, so we should make a good-will effort to read it and see what it says. The recognition of the existence of both types of pleasure does not imply the superiority of one over the other.

So one way to look at this is: in what context, while discussing what issues, would Epicurus say something like: "For most men rest is stagnation and activity is madness"? What teaching was being imparted? And WHY did this matter enough for our happiness that it needed to be included in the VS?

The reason why this matters is that the doctrine is being offered here as an alternative to concrete ethical problems (boredom, stagnation, existential ennui, stress, madness, etc.).

Post by "Cassius" of February 5, 2020 at 1:26 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

Why is this an established doctrine? Why would the Epicureans make this worthy of memorization?

Ok on this, point number one would be that we do **not** know that this was an "established doctrine" or that "The Epicureans made this worthy of memorization." This list is from the "Vatican Collection," the history of which is absolutely unknown as to who collected it or why. It is not in the list of the 40 Authorized Doctrines which would presumably be the list that people talk about as being memorized (also somewhat speculation). And to add to that, I've never seen any real documentation even of the Vatican list itself, in terms of where this original document now resides, what the Greek text was, etc. Hopefully it is out there somewhere but I've never been able to establish where -- maybe at some point we can find out and list that info here. But in the meantime, we really don't know who collected this list, what criteria they used, or why they collected it.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

The saying does not say or imply that abiding pleasures are "superior" to dynamic ones, or anything of that sort.

Yes I agree, this statement does not say that katastematic (the word I see used by the translators) pleasure is superior, so we must look to see if anyone of Epicurean credibility made that argument. That's where I see an absence of evidence.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

If this is being said by anyone, we should consider that a SEPARATE argument and put it in a thought bubble and address it separately, without losing the point being presented here, which is that there is a need to remedy both ethical problems.

The only people I am aware of who make such an argument, explicitly or implicitly, are those modern commentators (probably the majority of them) who are trying to bootstrap this to support the idea that "ataraxia" rather than "pleasure" is the goal of living. So to repeat I am not aware of any credible ancient Epicurean making that argument, which is the point made by Nikolsky and Gosling and Taylor in attacking that suggestion.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

I think VS 11 is pointing the finger at ailments / dis-eases that require medicin

Well yes ---- people who are engaged in stagnation or madness need to stop and do better - no doubt about that!

[Quote from Hiram](#)

"For most men rest is stagnation and activity is madness"? What teaching was being imparted? And WHY did this matter enough for our happiness that it needed to be included in the VS?

What teaching is being imparted? The observation that most men are hopelessly confused about how they should spend their time. Why was this statement preserved in the Vatican Sayings? Probably not much reason other than that it shows how radical Epicurus was in dismissing the lifestyles of so many people, because in pointing out the widespread nature of the error, he emphasizes that he has a better suggestion.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

The reason why this matters is that the doctrine is being offered here as an alternative to concrete ethical problems (boredom, stagnation, existential ennui, stress, madness, etc.).

Are you saying that some doctrine is being suggested here other than simply pointing out that most men waste both their free and their active time? Well if you are pointing to Epicurean philosophy as the therapy, then sure, but the issue of looking for a category of "resting pleasure" vs "active pleasure" is a prescription for undermining the entire philosophy, because pleasure is pleasure and the assertion that there is some intrinsic difference between the two types of pleasures is a direct road to Platonism, because such a distinction would require some authority higher than pleasure itself as a measure of choosing between the two. That's the entire point raised by Gosling and Taylor, [Nikolsky](#), and Wenham in disputing that this category game has any Epicurean basis whatsoever.

But may the most important thing to observe here is that what you appear to be doing is looking to take this statement, isolated by someone whom we know not, nor for what purpose, to bootstrap an argument that katastematic pleasure is somehow the highest good of life. That is explicitly the argument of Okeefe and others who opine about "ataraxia" as if it is something different from pleasure.

So while I am not saying at all that [VS11](#) is useless, I am pointing out that we have virtually no context for it. Without more context, it seems to me to make little sense to try to tease out of it

support for a doctrine (katastematic pleasure as the true end) that would undermine the fundamental "unity of pleasure" ("Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good...")

Post by "Hiram" of February 5, 2020 at 1:44 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Are you saying that some doctrine is being suggested here other than simply pointing out that most men waste both their free and their active time?

The Epicurean doctrine / teaching.

Post by "Hiram" of February 5, 2020 at 1:48 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But may the most important thing to observe here is that what **you appear to be doing is looking to take this statement**, isolated by someone whom we know not, nor for what purpose, **to bootstrap an argument that katastematic pleasure is somehow the highest good of life**. That is explicitly the argument of Okeefe and others who opine about "ataraxia" as if it is something different from pleasure.

This is a huge error on your part, to suppose that this is what I'm implying or saying, or to over-interpret VS 11 in this manner even. Nowhere is there mention of "higher", "lower", "better", "worse", etc. Read [VS11](#) again, and you will see. This is YOUR interpretation. The saying does not have to be interpreted in that manner.

Post by "Hiram" of February 5, 2020 at 3:19 PM

I understand if you insist on correcting what you see as an unEpicurean opinion, I'm simply pressing based on the need, once you correct an error, to come back to the writings and understand what the Epicureans were saying--because I have a hard time imagining that a Platonist sneaked into the Garden and added heretical notes to a scroll! 😊 It's more likely that the Epicureans were discussing these things and that the discussions belong to a legitimate line of reasoning, and that we owe it to ourselves to rescue that.

So that once we say: "passive pleasures are neither superior nor inferior to active ones", we have to consider what was being discussed in VS 11.

One of the possible things that comes to mind is that Epicurus has been cited as saying "I call you to constant pleasures", and that this line of reasoning is that passive and active pleasures both complete a lifestyle of constant pleasures. We can not be always active (or else we'd be exhausted) or constantly idle.

And if we fail to revisit VS 11 in good faith, or if we diss "idle pleasures" which are legitimate, we are missing an important component of our ethics.

Post by “Cassius” of February 5, 2020 at 3:55 PM

OK I am certainly fine, of course, to take whatever is good out of VS 11 and not construe it in any way other than consistent with Epicurus.

I construe it as pointing out that the majority of men, because they are lost in the darkness of false philosophy and false religion, mis-spend both their waking and their resting hours in ways that are other than pursuing pleasure. As for how to fix that, I see nothing really in VS 11 other than that observation. Of course even as a reminder of that observation, it is still very valuable, because it is consistent with many other observations in Epicurean philosophy, and is almost a direct statement from something out of any of several passages of Lucretius, which say approximately the same thing. The passages in Lucretius about "hearts in darkness" and the passage about the man who drives to his country estate as if to a fire, and then immediately back to his city house again, come to mind.

And I'm very glad we have it, even though we don't know who said it, for what purpose, in what context, or who recorded and preserved it in this list, or when or why. All of those observations about it are also true.

So how are you construing it?

Post by "Cassius" of February 5, 2020 at 4:16 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

One of the possible things that comes to mind is that Epicurus has been cited as saying "I call you to constant pleasures", and that this line of reasoning is that passive and active pleasures both complete a lifestyle of constant pleasures. We can not be always active (or else we'd be exhausted) or constantly idle.

And yes, I am good with that too!

I was just reacting initially to your title of the thread, which appears to place this in the kinetic/katastematic opposition analysis, which per the cites stated here is very misleading and essentially unEpicurean. So taken out of that context, I don't have any problem at all with this last conclusion.

Taking that further, your analysis helps provide a good construction of [VS11](#) which removes it as useful for the katastematic crowd, as long as people understand that background

So going back to this original statement, I agree that it "names a problem" but not one that is being addressed by "the kinetic/katastematic categories."

[Quote from Hiram](#)

I think VS 11 does seem to name a problem that is being addressed by the kinetic/katastematic categories of pleasures

As to those categories themselves, it's really hard for me to find a useful reason for Epicureans to refer to them (especially in untranslated Greek form), except to acknowledge that they were likely invented by pre-Epicurean enemies of pleasure of the good as an argument to undercut pleasure, for which Epicurus prepared an effective reply when he endorsed **both** and made clear that one does not have primacy over the other.

That's what I see in this statement from Diogenes Laertius - a medicinal response that inoculates against the false view that pleasures of "rest" are superior to pleasures of "action":

Epicurus differs from the Cyrenaics about pleasure. For they do not admit static pleasure, but only that which consists in motion. But Epicurus admits both kinds both in the soul and in the body, as he says in the work on Choice and Avoidance and in the book on The Ends of Life and in the first book On Lives and in the letter to his friends in Mytilene. Similarly, Diogenes in the 17th book of Miscellanies and Metrodorus in the Timocrates speak thus: 'Pleasure can be thought of both as

consisting in motion and as static.' And Epicurus in the work on Choice speaks as follows: 'Freedom from trouble in the mind and from pain in the body are static pleasures, but Joy and exultation are considered as active pleasures involving motion. '

And of course, to repeat [Nikolsky's](#) point, this is Diogenes Laertius, writing hundreds of years AFTER Epicurus, probably simply applying a rote formula which DL thought would be helpful to his readers of his own time, but which probably meant little more than a debating point to the Epicureans of Epicurus' time.

I think I want to really emphasize that last point, which is not mine but DeWitt's general argument. So much of Epicurus is really set of observations that inoculates the student against false ideas. Here, the inoculation is that once you realize that ALL pleasure is good, including both "active" and "resting" or any other categories you want to come up with, then you never get tempted to "Rank" those categories against each other, because you see that such categories are artificial and ultimately meaningless. Categorization like that is a trademark Aristotelian / Stoic / Platonic diversion, not something that is an inherent focus of Epicurean philosophy.

Even the "natural/necessary" distinction is ultimately nothing more than a rule of thumb and we don't have any significant examples of the Epicureans dwelling on it as as bright line test. Yes I know Torquatus praises it, and Epicurus cites it in the letter to Menoeceus, but if it were so critical there would be lots of examples of what activities fit in what categories, and there aren't such discussions -- for an obvious reason: context is king and what is "necessary" in one context is going to be absolutely "unnecessary" in another. The natural / necessary distinction is little more than a "rule of thumb" and as Torquatus explains, the principle behind the rule is nothing more than a call to evaluate how hard it is to achieve a particular pleasure in a particular context. And that in itself is nothing more than a call to examine the full consequences of any action action before you take it.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 5, 2020 at 8:04 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

One of the possible things that comes to mind is that Epicurus has been cited as saying "I call you to constant pleasures", and that this line of reasoning is that passive and active pleasures both complete a lifestyle of constant pleasures. We can not be always active (or else we'd be exhausted) or constantly idle.

This is also how I understand it. I don't know whether which authority or secondary literature is needed to explain it. But through my ignorance of different interpretations, the sentence simply tells me about the moderation between rest and activity.

Post by “Hiram” of February 6, 2020 at 9:21 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So how are you construing it?

It's making me think of Epicurus' promise that we will be able to enjoy CONSTANT pleasures if we apply what he taught, for instance like when he says in Menoeceus "you will never be disturbed either when awake or in sleep". I feel like this needs to be connected with the logic behind "constant" pleasures considering that it is not in our constitution to be constantly expending large amounts of energy, so we need to mind our dispositions while idle and while active. That's how I'm tending to construe it for the time being.

This (as well as the "physicians" question) is arising as a result of my work on the audiobook, because it's bringing up sources that I've never before considered with attention. I have to write introductions to the writings, which is forcing me to think about them carefully.

The physicians--I relate this to La Mettrie, who worked with patients with venereal diseases and who made the claim along the lines of "physicians are the best philosophers", or something to that effect. This was interpreted by one author writing an essay on La Mettrie as meaning that the physicians are the best philosophers because they think about the body and soul merely in material terms, seeing the body as a machine, rather than interpreting things like the theologians or by convention.

So naturally I wanted to see if the anti-physician discussions by Epicurus and Metrodorus had something to say on this, but I do not think that we can take things from one ancient context and apply it to the Enlightenment context.

Post by “Hiram” of February 6, 2020 at 9:28 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Even the "natural/necessary" distinction is ultimately nothing more than a rule of thumb and we don't have any significant examples of the Epicureans dwelling on it as a bright line test. ...

THAT category helps to protect us from runaway, innumerable, limitless desires that run to infinity, and this is a crucial component of Epicureanism. If there is no satiation, if you're in a constant state of anxiety and of craving needless things, you won't be able to abide in pleasure. Diogenes on his wall includes limitless desires as one of the roots of all evils. So it IS kind of important to know that we don't need much and that what we need, we can easily procure. Everything over that is the cherry on top.

Post by "Cassius" of February 6, 2020 at 9:34 AM

Yes I agree and I am ok of course with that interpretation. What I think as to be avoided is the implication that minimal amounts of food and water constitutes ALL anyone ever needs for a complete life. Epicurus himself did not live that way, and it would be ridiculous to assert that that was what he meant. But that is pretty much exactly the direction that significant numbers of writers seem to want to take the point, and that has to be guarded against.