

Differences between Epicureanism and Cyrenaicism

Post by "Kalosyni" of October 30, 2021 at 7:51 PM

This might bring up some ideas for consideration and further exploration of the differences between the teachings of Epicurus and Aristippus.

The following paragraphs are quoted from:

[Epicurus | | Mt. San Antonio College](#)

Quote

"In opposition to Aristippus, Epicurus maintains that the duration of pleasures is more important than their intensity in achieving happiness. Consequently, he argues that the mental pleasures are in general superior to the physical pleasures, because they are longer-lasting, albeit less intense. Although he finds the physical pleasures unobjectionable in themselves, he contends that the pursuit of them for their own sake leads not to happiness but to its opposite. Experience shows us that the desire for a life filled with intense pleasures will be frustrated, because there are not enough of them in the ordinary course of events. What is more, the pleasures derived from such objectives as fame, wealth, and the like are usually outweighed by the pains necessary to procure them, and the pains consequent upon such activities as feasting, drinking, and merrymaking either cancel the pleasures or leave a balance of pain. From these considerations, Epicurus can only conclude that Aristippus' standard of judging what is good - that is, "the most intense, sensual pleasure of the moment" - is entirely self-defeating."

"The chief difference between Cyrenaicism and Epicureanism lies in their divergent conception of the nature of true pleasure. Fundamental to their disagreement is the distinction between active or positive pleasure, which comes from the gratification of specific wants and desires, and passive or negative pleasure, which is the absence of pain. Aristippus sets as the goal of life a constant round of active pleasures, whereas Epicurus maintains that the active pleasures are important only insofar as they terminate the pain of unfulfilled desires. For Epicurus, the passive pleasures are more fundamental than the active, because it is through them that happiness is gained. A human being's ultimate goal is not a constant succession of intense sensual pleasures, but is rather the state of serenity, *ataraxia*, characterized by "freedom from trouble in the mind and pain in the body."

"Epicurus assures us that the calm and repose of the good life are within the reach of all. It is necessary that we keep our desires at a minimum, however, and distinguish the natural and necessary desires from those that are artificial - for example, longings for wealth, excitement, fame, and power. The latter are not merely unnecessary to health and tranquility but are in fact destructive of them. By contrast, the satisfaction of the natural desires (the desires that must be fulfilled to preserve bodily health and mental peace) and the freedom from pain that accompanies such satisfaction lead to happiness."

"Epicurus tells us that our good can be realized through philosophy, the quest for knowledge. It must be understood, however, that the function of philosophy is preeminently practical:

Vain is the world of a philosopher which does not heal any suffering of man. For justis there is no profit in medicine if it does not expel the diseases of the body, so here is no profit in philosophy either, if it does not expel the suffering of the mind."

"By nature men seek pleasure, but by knowledge they are guided to the choice of the true pleasures. Without deliberation, we cannot hope either to forestall needless and artificial desires or to secure the pleasures required for happiness. In addition, without knowledge of the nature of things, we cannot rid ourselves of the fears and superstitions that destroy tranquility."

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Post by "Godfrey" of October 30, 2021 at 8:43 PM

Some quick thoughts....

I'm not very familiar with Aristippus and his ideas. But for Epicurus it was very important to have a correct view of the gods and death, meaning a correct world view, as a central component of a life of pleasure. So I'm curious as to the world view of Aristippus was.

In another thread we've been discussing pleasure and some of the PDs. One approach to comparing the two philosophies would be to compare "a constant round of active pleasures" to pleasure as described in [PD03](#), [PD09](#) and [PD10](#). For instance [PD10](#) could be read as a direct Epicurean response to Aristippus, although I don't know if that's historically accurate.

Quote

[PD10](#) If the things that produce the delights of those who are decadent washed away the mind's fears about astronomical phenomena and death and suffering, and furthermore if they taught us the limits of our pains and desires, then we would have no complaints against them, since they would be filled with every joy and would contain not a single pain or distress (and that's what is bad).

Looking at [PD03](#) is tricky as it's usually mentioned as a rebuttal to Plato. But what if you look at it as a recipe for the best life, from which you can and should draw your own conclusions? If you are striving for the greatest pleasure, how could you go about it? People immediately jump to "Remove all pain! Remove all pain!" But is that really what he's saying? True, if you've reached the limit of pleasure then you won't have feelings of pain. So how do you do that? If you have pleasure in your stomach for a moment then there's no pain in your stomach for that moment. If you have peace of mind for a moment then there's no pain in your mind for that moment. Knowing this, you can strategize how to achieve the longest lasting, most complete and most sustainable experience of pleasure.

Quote

[PD03](#) The limit of enjoyment is the removal of all pains. Wherever and for however long pleasure is present, there is neither bodily pain nor mental distress.

Post by "Don" of October 30, 2021 at 10:10 PM

I have some issues with the Mt. SAC summary of Epicurus's philosophy. I tried to dig up another source for comparison:

Quote

According to Aelian (VH 14.6 = SSR 174, part),

Aristippus...advised people not to pain themselves either in memory of what is past or in anticipation of future events (μήτε τοῖς παρελθοῦσιν ἐπικάμνειν μήτε τῶν ἐπιόντων προκάμνειν)...His advice was to keep one's thought focused on the day, and in fact on that part of the day in which one was carrying out this or that action or thought. For only the present is ours, he said, unlike what is already over and what is still awaited, of which the former has perished, while with the latter it is unclear whether it will be.

[From Sedley, Epicurean versus Cyrenaic Happiness](#)

Post by “Godfrey” of October 30, 2021 at 11:18 PM

That leads to quite a different understanding than "Aristippus sets as the goal of life a constant round of active pleasures." Looks like a fruitful paper!

Post by “Don” of October 30, 2021 at 11:24 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

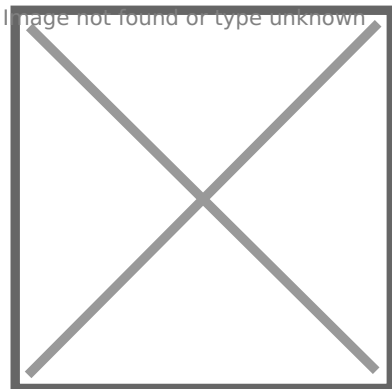
That leads to quite a different understanding than "Aristippus sets as the goal of life a constant round of active pleasures." Looks like a fruitful paper!

I've really found Sedley to be my go-to modern scholar, much more so than even Dewitt (Shhh! Don't tell [Cassius](#) !)

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 31, 2021 at 1:37 AM

Thank you [Don](#) for sharing the link. I find it worthwhile and new angles to explore, with regard to the balance of pleasure over a full life --- bodily (physical sensation) and mental (delight and tranquility).

Reposting link:



[Epicurean versus Cyrenaic happiness](#)

Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2021 at 1:47 AM

The way the quote system works these look like quotes from Kalosyni but of course they are from the article. {Note - I edited the post and now these quotes just say "Quote"} Kalosyni has found a good article for displaying in condensed form many of what I consider to be the worst and most inaccurate takes on Epicurean philosophy.

For example I think each if the following assertions is factually untrue - and not even close to correct. These are the "neo stoic" views which make the version of Epicurean philosophy presented here - if it were true - not worth the paper it's written on:

Quote

Epicurus maintains that the duration of pleasures is more important than their intensity in achieving happiness.

I suspect he is mainly referring there to the section by Torquatus in "on Ends" which says that mental pleasures can be more significant than bodily pleasures because they can last longer, but he does not say that is necessarily so, nor does he say that duration is more important than intensity. There are passages that say the opposite, including the letter to Menoecus where he specifically says we do not choose the longest, but the most pleasant.

Quote

Epicurus maintains that the active pleasures are important only insofar as they terminate the pain of unfulfilled desires. For Epicurus, the passive pleasures are more fundamental

That is the katestematic/kinetic assertion that is contained only one place in Diogenes Laertius, in a place that does not say that katestematic is more important. The place to start reading on this is Boris [Nikolsky](#) 's article Epicurus on Pleasure.

Quote

Epicurus assures us that the calm and repose of the good life are within the reach of all

Overbroad. He specifically says that the study of nature is required and that not everyone is constitutionally disposed towards wisdom. But the implication here that the "good life" is easily within reach should not be taken to mean that you can do or be whatever you want and still attain a good life.

Quote

It is necessary that we keep our desires at a minimum, however

This is pure asceticism and would go even further even than do the Stoics to destroy human life -- if it were truly what he taught, but it is not. Every aspect of Epicurean philosophy is geared toward focusing on pleasure as the goal, not at "keeping our desires at a minimum" as a goal. [VS63](#), which is rarely if ever quoted by people who make this quoted assertion, specifically says:

[VS63](#). Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess.

Were these quotes an accurate summary I would consider this philosophy to be worse than Stoicism - which would be quite a feat. I won't go into each of them here beyond what I wrote above, but we can take each in turn in greater detail if anyone would like. Probably the better place for most of those would however be in the forum [Epicurean Philosophy vs. Stoicism](#)

In regard to Sedley I too hold him in high regard. The main difference I see between Sedley and DeWitt is that Sedley writes to an academic audience and he doesn't make it his goal to write to average readers and to disabuse them of the ideas presented in the quoted-from article. That's what DeWitt does.

If not for DeWitt I myself might well have accepted the quoted-from "stoic lite" view of Epicurus, and none of us would be having this conversation here because I would have rejected Epicurus with great prejudice and this website would not be here.

None of these comments are aimed at Katosyni of course because what she has done in posting this is do us the favor of reminding us (as we need to be reminded constantly!) What is out there and what we are up against in trying to understand [classical Epicurean philosophy](#).

So Kalosyni please ask specifically about any of these quoted sections you think may be accurate and we can go through the evidence against them.

Post by "Don" of October 31, 2021 at 5:12 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The way the quote system works these look like quotes from Kalosyni but of course they are from the article.

Yes, very important to point out. The only way I've found to get around that is to use the html editor and replace the name in the data-author field inside the woltlab element. Needles to say, it's a tad tedious.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The main difference I see between Sedley and DeWitt is that Sedley writes to an academic audience and he doesn't make it his goal to write to average readers and to disabuse them of the ideas presented in the quoted-from article. That's what DeWitt does.

I knew my comment would get a reaction 😊 But seriously, I definitely see your point and the importance of the course of events set in motion by your reading *Epicurus and His Philosophy* cannot be overstated.

Personally, and this due to the style of delivery, his penchant to sometimes not cite his sources, and his over-the-top Christianity spotting, I much prefer reading DeWitt's academic papers over *Epicurus and His Philosophy*. Not to mention *Epicurus and St. Paul*. But I freely admit DeWitt is a top notch scholar (and advocate) of Epicurus and very worth reading.

Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2021 at 7:28 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Yes, very important to point out. The only way I've found to get around that is to use the html editor and replace the name in the data-author field inside the woltlab element. Needles to say, it's a tad tedious.

Thanks, that helped me see how to figure it out. That first icon in the editor toolbar opens up the html code and there you can see and delete where the code is referencing the Author's name. Fixed.

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 31, 2021 at 12:15 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Every aspect of Epicurean philosophy is geared toward focusing on pleasure as the goal, not at "keeping our desires at a minimum" as a goal.

[Cassius](#) that's too much of a black and white, all or nothing interpretation. The desires that should be kept to a minimum are those that lead to pain and difficulty.

Now as I read your comments, I would venture to say, that on this forum you, my dear Cassius...you are forging a new kind of Epicureanism, and in fact you are a "Neo-Epicurean" yourself...and it could be called "Cassianism".

And this very well might be it's formula:

Assertiveness + material wealth + daily enjoyment of using one's wealth = the goal of life is to enjoy your material riches in physical pleasure.

So those who have the wealth to do so may follow this hybrid interpretation.

Those of us who are less wealthy understand the benefits of not investing mental energy onto all the modern "dainties" that could be acquired if one had the money to buy them. And so we turn our attention to focus much more intently onto mental pleasures.

My words of advice: What the wise should cultivate desire for (and then take action on) is this: Friendship, companionship, camaraderie, good conversations, and time to be physically present with friends.

Cassius and all, I wish you well. And may you live in blessedness.

(Of course, any and all who wish to respond here, please do so).

Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2021 at 12:55 PM

Kalosyni I would turn your comment around and say that what you are saying about me is "too much of a black and white interpretation."

Yes I do think that some things about what Epicurus taught are indeed black and white (for example no life after death; no supernatural gods) but that others are in fact much more subtle

(the role of pleasure and in fact the proper definition of pleasure.

I certainly agree with your categorization of friendship as among the top ways to invest one's time. That is exactly what Epicurus advised in PD 27.

I am sorry you feel that I am drawing lines between those with wealth and those without. Wealth is certainly only one circumstance that plays into how one makes one's choices, and wealth is certainly not an end in itself, any more than friendship itself is an end in itself ("Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life...")

I have enjoyed our discussions and hope you will continue to participate. Remember, however, that the forum does have a purpose and a goal beyond just discussing philosophy in general, and so I hope you'll consider that in your evaluation of what I and others post here. I do my very best to make clear from the beginning that the purpose of the forum is to explore Epicurean philosophy from the perspective of its founders, and only after that to offer variations from their original theme. There's a lot of conflict among people who spend their entire professional careers studying Epicurus as to what he meant in certain areas, and that means ultimately that it's necessary to take a position on which interpretations are within the sphere of reasonableness as to what the ancient Epicureans actually taught.

That's why even as I speak against what I see as the errors of Stoic philosophy, I respect those who take the time to determine and explain the original foundations of Stoicism before they create their own versions under the same label. To get to the bottom of these issues there's really no other way than "frank discussion" and calling things as we see them, even when the result can appear to some to be excessively "dogmatic." You'll recall from Diogenes Laertius that to the best we can these are attributes of what the wise man will do:

"One wise man is not wiser than another. He will be ready to make money, but only when he is in straits and by means of his philosophy. He will pay court to a king, if occasion demands. He will rejoice at another's misfortunes, but only for his correction. And he will gather together a school, but never so as to become a popular leader. He will give lectures in public, but never unless asked; he will give definite teaching and not profess doubt. In his sleep he will be as he is awake, and on occasion he will even die for a friend."

Post by "Kalosyni" of October 31, 2021 at 10:00 PM

Thank you for your reply [Cassius](#). I did feel a bit "reactive" earlier today as I was writing my previous post, which is not the best frame of mind to post dialog.

Yes, you are right about me. I at times slip into black and white thinking...I do need to work on catching and correcting it (and attribute slip-ups to Christian fundamentalist upbringing).

And finally, it comes down to our slightly different interpretations of Epicurean philosophy. I need to get clear about which Epicurean ideas are ambiguous...and I need to sit down on my own and write out my personal interpretation of Epicurean philosophy, plainly and with references to the PD's etc.

Post by "Cassius" of November 1, 2021 at 7:26 AM

And I and I am sure others stand ready to give you constructive comment and suggestions as you do that.

You have been very polite and constructive so far and it is definitely within the scope of the forum to walk through the preliminary learning stages with people who have an open and constructive attitude.

I hope you will understand however that it's a practical concern arising from many years of experience (and reading about centuries of dispute before that) that as DeWitt says Epicurus is simultaneously one of the most loved but also most hated philosophers. Many sincere people decide to cast their lot with supernatural gods or virtue idealism, and once they make up their minds to do so their constant argument has to be dealt with for everyone's sake.

One of the most core aspects of this forum is that the world is full of people who want to selectively adopt some aspects of Epicurean philosophy (especially use if the phrase "absence of pain") and ignore or repudiate the rest.

We therefore set up the forum as a place where those of us who want to be sure we understand the full extent of the philosophy can collaborate among ourselves free from the constant roar of greedy Acheron harping from the Stoic - Academic community.

You'll know if and when the time for you to withdraw comes, and I doubt you are anywhere near that point yet.

In fact I am sure we have many lurkers who are committed to other views but do not "make trouble" because they profit from reading along. I have been pleasantly surprised that we have had far fewer problems than I originally expected we would have, largely I think because we do try to be clear in the welcome message, terms of service, posts, etc that we do have these limits. So please understand that the reminders of the limits are not by any means directed at you personally but are needed to maintain the ongoing continuity of the forum as others read them in the future.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 4, 2021 at 2:02 PM

[Quote from Diogenes Laertius](#)

"He differs from the Cyrenaics with regard to pleasure. They do not include under the term the pleasure which is a state of rest, but only that which consists in motion. Epicurus admits both; also pleasure of mind as well as of body, as he states in his work *On Choice and Avoidance* and in that *On the Ethical End*, and in the first book of his work *On Human Life* and in the epistle to his philosopher friends in Mytilene.

So also Diogenes in the seventeenth book of his *Epilecta*, and Metrodorus in his *Timocrates*, whose actual words are: "Thus Pleasure being conceived both as that species which consists in motion and that which is a state of rest." The words of Epicurus in his work *On Choice* are : "Peace of mind and freedom from pain are pleasures which imply a state of rest; joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity."

He further disagrees with the Cyrenaics in that they hold that pains of body are worse than mental pains; at all events evil-doers are made to suffer bodily punishment; whereas Epicurus holds the pains of the mind to be the worse; at any rate the flesh endures the storms of the present alone, the mind those of the past and future as well as the present. In this way also he holds mental pleasures to be greater than those of the body."

"And as proof that pleasure is the end he adduces the fact that living things, so soon as they are born, are well content with pleasure and are at enmity with pain, by the prompting of nature and apart from reason. Left to our own feelings, then, we shun pain; as when even Heracles, devoured by the poisoned robe, cries aloud,

"And bites and yells, and rock to rock resounds,
Headlands of Locris and Euboean cliffs."

"And we choose the virtues too on account of pleasure and not for their own sake, as we take medicine for the sake of health. So too in the twentieth book of his *Epilecta* says Diogenes, who also calls education recreation. Epicurus describes virtue as the sine qua non of pleasure, i.e. the one thing without which pleasure cannot be,

everything else, food, for instance, being separable, i.e. not indispensable to pleasure."

Come, then, let me set the seal, so to say, on my entire work as well as on this philosopher's life by citing his [Principal Doctrines](#), so to bring the whole work to a close and making the end of it to coincide with the beginning of happiness:"

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So this highlights both the pleasure of rest and the pleasure of action...

....so both "the cake AND the frosting". 😊

Post by "Don" of November 4, 2021 at 2:25 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

So this highlights both the pleasure of rest and the pleasure of action...

....so both "the cake AND the frosting".

😊 I like that characterization. Epicurus serves up the whole slice.

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2021 at 2:30 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

So this highlights both the pleasure of rest and the pleasure of action...

....so both "the cake AND the frosting".

Yes that is the important point - Epicurus praised both (really ALL) kinds of pleasure, and there is no reason to differentiate between the static and the moving. If you can find the time please read the article by [Nikolsky](#) "Epicurus on Pleasure" and now that you see that Diogenes Laertius confirms that Epicurus praised both / all, and he never remotely said that the active pleasures are for the sake of the static (or vice versa) then you are prepared to see that the standard argument that you should go for pleasures of "rest" in all things is hogwash. There is no true rest in human life (or in the universe for that matter) because all atoms are constantly in

motion. "Rest" is a fiction of the Platonic imagination because his realm of forms (which does not exist) is the only place where "things" allegedly remain immovable and the same. There is no "horseness" - only horses, and there are in my view no real pleasures that can be considered unmoving or at rest, only some which last longer than others.

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2021 at 2:40 PM

The opening of Chapter 19 of Gosling & Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure" is also very informative. In it, they observe that

" 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." (my emphasis. Elsewhere in the book they discuss this further and make clear that kinetic implies change of any kind, which is why they include learning here, and when you think about the "change" component, it's sweeping in scope.)

At the end of the first paragraph is the sentence "But he [a commentator] agrees that all sensory pleasures are kinetic."

In other words, when you trace back the meaning of "kinetic" you find that it really means anything that changes, and that means not only bodily pleasure but also mental pleasure -- in fact ANYTHING that you can sense as pleasurable. Which logically leads you to the question, "Well if you can't sense katastematic pleasure (if you can sense it, it must be kinetic) then what good is katastematic pleasure?"

And I would say thus you're on the trail of the ridiculous position that there's something special called katastematic pleasure which is what Epicurus held to be the real goal of life.

I know my position here sounds radical and hard to accept, but read [Nikolsky](#) first (he's shorter) and then read this chapter. [Gosling & Taylor - On Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasure](#) Gosling and Taylor are well-credentialed academics and don't suffer from the disrepute in which DeWitt is held in some (not all) academic circles.

Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures

10.0.1. Nevertheless, Epicurus considered pleasure to be the good and he that pleases most that circumstances make 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 fully unproblematic which pleasures are kinetic. All sensory pleasures fall into this category and perhaps some mental ones such as learning. This dovetails Diogenes' selection of passages, and it tends to be a point of agreement among commentators who disagree about the nature of katastematic pleasures and its relation to kinetic. Thus Diogenes, and after him Rieu,⁴ 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 body in question, and that is another way of saying that there is prior katastematic pleasure in the senses. On the other side, Morison argues for a more positive view of katastematic pleasures, considering it the state of joy of a being free of pain and anxiety. But he agrees that all sensory pleasures are kinetic.

10.0.2. 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 Diogenes/Rieu 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 1100b24) who thought the best condition out of apatheia. On the Morison view it becomes slightly more intelligible why

Post by “Don” of November 4, 2021 at 3:30 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

There is no true rest in human life (or in the universe for that matter) because all atoms are constantly in motion. "Rest" is a fiction of the Platonic imagination because his realm of forms (which does not exist) is the only place where "things" allegedly remain immovable and the same. There is no "horseness" - only horses, and there are in my view no real pleasures that can be considered unmoving or at rest, only some which last longer than others.

I have to take some issue with your conflating "rest" with Platonic ideals. I may be reading too much into your post, but here's my response anyway.

If there were "no true rest in human life" that would be an abominable situation. We have to find some "rest" in the storm, otherwise we're at the mercy of the storm, tossed wave to wave. Epicurus defines (in some places) a pleasurable life as "health of the body and tranquility of the mind." That's the kind of "rest" I would say he advocated. You can't lead a pleasurable life if your body is unhealthy and your mind is troubled by fears and agitated by anxiety or anger (for example). In fact, pleasure can be more fully experienced in that state of health and "peace of mind." There's no hint of a Platonic ideal, just practicality. That tranquility (ataraxia in the phrase "tranquility of the mind") isn't the goal, but it is a pleasurable experience; plus I find it interesting that it's origin it's in a metaphor of calm seas.

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2021 at 4:17 PM

Well, "rest" is another word that has lots of shades of meaning. 😊

"Coming to rest" in atomic terms is never anything more than temporary, while at the other extreme a thing like "horseness" was intended (in my view) to refer to something eternally unchangeable.

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2021 at 4:53 PM

I haven't re-read either the [Nikolsky](#) article or the Gosling & Taylor chapter, but if I recall one of my reactions to G&T it is that there is in my view extreme difficulty in ascertaining what "katastematic" pleasure really is if it cannot be sensed. I tend to focus on the fact that that which cannot be sensed is nothing to us, as in PD2, and if we are defining Katastematic pleasure in that way then that poses real problems for the person asserting that it is important, much less that it is the true goal of life.

But to really dig into this it's necessary to go back in the history that G&T present, because what I am remembering is not just that any pleasure that can be sensed is by definition kinetic, it's really an issue of "change" or "motion" at the deepest level that is involved. In other words that's why the referenced "learning" but it goes further -- if you can sense any change at all, much less a beginning or an end, to the activity, then it's kinetic. In fact you pretty much have to rule out anything that is an "activity" or anything that you "feel" -- which gets into the complicated implications of "feeling" vs. "sensation." I personally think it's fair to say that if you can "feel" the pleasure then you're engaged in a kinetic pleasure, and that includes "feeling good" or "feeling appreciation for a work of art" or "feeling happy" or any other experience of life. In fact that focus on "experience" - if I recall correctly - is the point of the Wenham article, because the argument would be that anything that can be "experienced" is kinetic -- meaning that katastematic pleasure (I get to the point where I hate even to type the word) cannot be "experienced."

[Wenham - On Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure in Epicurus](#)

(I'm really going out on a limb here because I haven't read Wenham in a long time, and my memory is already questionable - I hope I am at least partly right in citing him for that proposition. 😊)

Edit:

OK yes glancing at the abstract indicates to me that while I may have to be corrected, there's probably at least some resemblance between the way I described it and the content of the

article:

The standard interpretation of the concept of *katastematic* pleasure in Epicurus has it referring to "static" states from which feeling is absent. We owe the prevalence of this interpretation to Cicero's account of Epicureanism in his *De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum*. Cicero's account, in turn, is based on the Platonic theory of pleasure. The standard interpretation, when applied to principles of Epicurean hedonism, leads to fundamental contradictions in his theory. I claim that it is not Epicurus, but the standard interpretation that generates these errors because the latter construes pleasure in Epicurus according to an *attitudinal* theoretical framework, whilst the account of pleasure that emerges from Epicurean epistemology sees it as *experiential*.

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 4, 2021 at 5:29 PM

Thank you for the reading recommendations [Cassius](#).

For me the *katastematic* "pleasure at rest" is a mental sense of satisfaction and gratitude, a quiet feeling of joy...when everything is fulfilled. So it is like a cat sitting in the warm sun and purring, and enjoying the sense of aliveness. It isn't a permanent state. And many modern people might prefer to "keep busy" in life and so miss out on experiencing the quiet kind of pleasure. Modern life is noisy, and active entertainment is everywhere. I can imagine that back before modern technology, "pleasure at rest" was even more enjoyable when shared with good friends.

Perhaps my viewpoint comes from past dabbling in Zen meditation (and modified by a Theravadin approach of sitting for the feeling of bodily enjoyment). I admit that the "pleasure at rest" sense of satisfaction doesn't happen for me very often. But I wonder if Epicurus might have taught this in the Garden. And if it was lost, though it's not something that easily translates into words.

Post by "Don" of November 4, 2021 at 6:34 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Perhaps my viewpoint comes from past dabbling in Zen meditation (and modified by a Theravadin approach of sitting for the feeling of bodily enjoyment).

You'll find several of us here with some Buddhism in our backgrounds.

Post by “Don” of November 4, 2021 at 6:52 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I admit that the "pleasure at rest" sense of satisfaction doesn't happen for me very often. But I wonder if Epicurus might have taught this in the Garden. And if it was lost, though it's not something that easily translates into words.

I'm very skeptical if Epicurus taught a form of sitting (Eastern) meditation in the Garden. But his use of the word μελετᾶν/μελέτη "study, practice, meditate on, practice, exercise" suggests to me some form of sustained focused attention on and memorization of the [Principal Doctrines](#) and other epitomes and summaries. That being said, mindfulness, in my opinion, could easily be incorporated into an Epicurean practice (as that podcast I recently posted suggests to me). Anything that makes us more aware of our feelings and makes us better able to make informed decisions on what to choose and what to reject seems applicable to me.

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2021 at 7:20 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

For me the katastematic "pleasure at rest" is a mental sense of satisfaction and gratitude, a quiet feeling of joy...when everything is fulfilled.

See the difficulty there is that if you can "feel" the sensation of pleasure -- which I think is doubly clear when you refer to it as joy, then by definition according to the scholars what you are feeling is not katastematic pleasure - it is kinetic simply because you do in fact feel and enjoy it.

Once again I want to be especially clear: I am not criticizing yours or anyone else's descriptions of what you feel. What I am doing is pointing out that when you dive deep into the technical terms that they were using in ancient Greeks, there is a lot of specificity that we as "normal people" who haven't devoted our lives to studying ancient Greek and Greek philosophy don't have any way of knowing about.

In fact as I write this comment I think what we're talking about here is exactly what a large number of commentators are doing and have done to us. We all can feel at times what it means to "rest" and to have a "good attitude" and a "positive outlook" and similar emotions feelings. We know that those are important to us, and so when we read (from the commentators!!!) that

Epicurus was really interested in "resting" pleasures, we presume "Oh that makes sense and I totally agree!" and we end up endorsing the "kinetic / katastematic distinction" as if it were a really important part of Epicurean philosophy.

To the contrary, I think [Nikolsky](#), Gosling & Taylor, Wenham, and others (I'll include dewitt here) have totally demolished that argument and upended the academic viewpoint. They have done so not by showing that such pleasures don't exist - they clearly do! But rather the academic viewpoint has never been consistent with or perceptive in understanding what Epicurus taught. You can't follow the full argument without the information that [Nikolsky](#) provides, which is that this darned katastematic-kinetic distinction is an essentially STOIC method of categorization, and that it likely appears in Diogenes Laertius only because by 300 AD (when DL wrote) and even by 50 BC (when Cicero was trying to defeat Epicureans with word games) it had become common practice among philosophers to split up types of pleasures using those terms. DL was going through chapter after chapter of Greek philosophers attempting to explain their positions in terms that people in 300AD would expect to see, and in 300 AD most people interested in philosophy (not necessarily including Epicureans of the day) expected to hear about katastematic pleasure.

OK - again - these aren't my arguments, these are the arguments of people a lot smarter than me (Gosling, Taylor, [Nikolsky](#), etc.)

But I will repeat too that I think Wenham points out a real key to the situation. If you always keep in mind that nothing trumps PD2, and that all good and evil comes to us through sensation, and without sensation we're dead, and that nothing that doesn't produce sensation is of any concern to us, then you will burn in your mind that "pleasure" (which we all seem to agree is the ultimate goal) must come to us through sensation - through experience. And is apparently universal among the literati that the definition of katastematic pleasure EXCLUDES pleasure that can be sensed. I leave it to you to unwind what that means as to "katastematic pleasure" as the ancient Greeks defined it, but I suggest to everyone that Epicurus was interested in pleasure that can be felt. Pleasure that can't be felt - no matter what term is applied to it, not only cannot therefore be the highest good, as so many allege, but I would allege in turn that if it can't be felt it is of no more concern to us than death itself.

Which makes it prime territory for the Stoics and other logicians, who apparently were the ones obsessing over the term.

Post by "Don" of November 4, 2021 at 8:04 PM

In my study, I'm coming to the conclusion that [katastematic](#) pleasure refers to deriving pleasure from a stable (albeit temporary) state or condition while [kinetic](#) pleasure has to do with deriving pleasure from an action. To me, this makes sense if ataraxia is a katastematic pleasure. Tranquility is a stable state of being. Eating, drinking etc are kinetic pleasure.

This is all in flux, but I'm exploring this as an avenue of research in authoritative sources.

PS: My understanding is that the Cyrenaics only recognized "kinetic" pleasures. Epicurus recognized all sources of pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2021 at 9:59 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

In my study, I'm coming to the conclusion that katastematic pleasure refers to deriving pleasure from a stable (albeit temporary) state or condition while kinetic pleasure has to do with deriving pleasure from an action.

it will be beneficial as we go along in the future to to post sources so we can see what exactly exists in the Epicurean texts to support the respective reconstructions.

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2021 at 10:55 PM

OK I have re-read the Wenham Article ("On Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure") and I do need to correct what I said above:

I now remember why I find Wenham's article useful, but not in the way of Gosling & Taylor and [Nikolsky](#).

The key point of departure in Wenham is that when Wenham is forced to decide whether Cicero (1) misrepresented Epicurus or (2) misunderstood Epicurus, Wenham departs from G&T and decides to go easy on Cicero and accuse him of incompetence rather than malevolence. Here's the key part - Wenham is sure Cicero is wrong, but the question is WHY:

WINDS UP WITH A SERIES OF PROBLEMS AND SEEMING CONTRADICTIONS.

How, then, to show that the standard interpretation is mistaken? There are two ways to go. Firstly, we might extend our challenge to Cicero's credibility as an expositor of Epicureanism by appeal to factors that bear indirectly on his interpretation. For instance, we might suggest that Cicero's polemic intent in book two of *De Finibus* so biased his interpretation in book one that the latter cannot be trusted — we

MATHEW WENHAM

might, that is, say that book one is a setup. Alternatively, we might try to show that Cicero's interpretation of Epicurus conflicts with the other uncontested aspects of the Epicurean system to such an extent that it is improbable that Cicero is correct. In their work, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (1983), Gosling and Taylor make one of the few challenges to the standard interpretation by way of the first of the above methods (pp. 345–413). I have neither the space nor the expertise to attempt anything similar here. Nevertheless, I think a more effective objection to the standard interpretation can be mounted using the alternative method. Namely, I think the standard interpretation of *katastematic* pleasure can be shown to conflict with clearly established, and widely agreed upon aspects of Epicurean epistemology.

.... And so Wenham decides that Cicero simply must be wrong. The rest of the article gives his reasoning, which is where my memory was bad. Wenham says (I think rightly) that Epicurus held that pleasure is pleasure because it can be experienced, and so Wenham concludes that whatever *katastematic* pleasure it, is must be felt / experienced just like kinetic pleasure.

Maybe you'll read the article differently than I do, but where does that leave Wenham in describing what *katastematic* pleasure must mean (under this theory)? I've read over the article several times, and I think he's left right where we would expect. He can't and doesn't even try to define *katastematic* pleasure as separate from kinetic. All he does is conclude that whatever it is, it must be "experienced" or "felt" because that's the way Epicurus looked at pleasure.

So as I read it this article would implicitly support Don's current position, but I say that still convinced that the reason Wenham stops where he does is that he doesn't follow Gosling & Taylor to the logical conclusion that [Nikolsky](#) took them. Wenham chooses to believe that despite Cicero's sweeping knowledge, access to the Epicurean friends and teachers, and Cicero's own training in Epicurean philosophy, that Cicero simply "misunderstood" what Epicurus was saying.

That's where I would say that people should trust their instincts and always beware of lawyers!

And so I take the position taken by Norman DeWitt, another line I haven't forgotten despite my poor memory: "*i do not believe he could have misrepresented the truth so successfully had he not understood it completely.*"

MARY N. PORTER PACKER. Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Ethics. New York, The Columbia University Press, 1938. Pp. 127. Columbia Diss.

This study is most commendable. It is clearly written and well printed, acutely reasoned and amply documented. The treatment confines itself to *De Finibus* I-II and is divided into two chapters: 1. Cicero's Presentation of Epicurean Philosophy in *De Finibus* I. 2. Cicero's Critique of Epicurean Philosophy, Presented in *De Finibus* I and II. Each chapter concludes with a summary, and the text of Epicurus himself is abundantly cited. The conclusion is that Cicero failed "to understand Epicureanism as a consistently unified philosophy (p. 81)," but is acquitted of having been "deliberately and intentionally unfair (p. 119)."

It is only to this acquittal that I take exception. Every debater has the choice of arguing to reveal the truth in its entirety or of arguing to make points. The former method is adapted to the Supreme Court, the latter to a trial by jury. Cicero was a crafty old trial lawyer and he deliberately argued to make points, because he was pleading before a reading audience, which functions like a jury, and his shrewd legal mind had long discerned the vulnerability of Epicureanism before this style of attack. His attitude was that of William J. Bryan toward biological evolution, and his pleadings are comparable to a Scopes trial, but I do not believe he could have misrepresented the truth so successfully had he not understood it completely. In the Scopes trial, the crafty old lawyer was on the opposite side—Clarence Darrow.

NORMAN W. DEWITT.

VICTORIA COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO.

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2021 at 11:04 PM

For now, one more comment as to Cicero's own views, this from the first part of *De Officiis*, which Cicero wrote to his son:

in oratorical power and in mental training.

2 You will, therefore, learn from the foremost of present-day philosophers, and you will go on learning as long as you wish; and your wish ought to continue as long as you are not dissatisfied with the progress you are making. For all that, if you will read my philosophical books, you will be helped; my philosophy is not very different from that of the Peripatetics (for both they and I claim to be followers of Socrates and Plato). As to the conclusions you may reach, I leave that to your own judgment (for I would put no hindrance in your way), but by reading my philosophical

Greek Philosophy and Cicero's own.

B2 3

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2021 at 11:16 PM

And Cicero's own very unflattering views of Epicurus and of the role of pleasure and virtue (if he

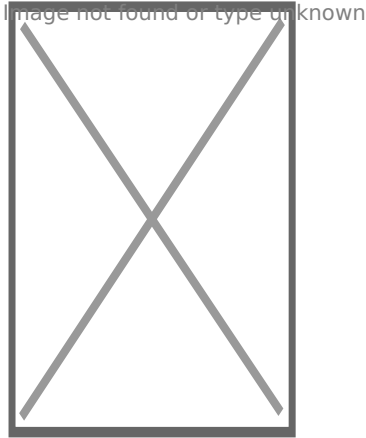
This is an inquiry common to all philosophers; for where is the man who will presume to style himself a philosopher, and lay down no rules of duty? But there are certain schools which pervert all duty by the ultimate objects of good and evil which they propose. For if a man should lay down as the chief good, that which has no connection

with virtue, and measure it by his own interests, and not according to its moral merit; if such a man shall act consistently with his own principles, and is not sometimes influenced by the goodness of his heart, he can cultivate neither friendship, justice, nor generosity. In truth, it is impossible for the man to be brave who shall pronounce pain to be the greatest evil, or temperate who shall propose pleasure as the highest good.

Though these truths are so self-evident that they require no philosophical discussion, yet they have been treated by me elsewhere. I say, therefore, that if these schools are self-consistent, they can say nothing of the moral duties. Neither can any firm, permanent, or natural rules of duty be laid down, but by those who esteem virtue to be solely or by those who deem it to be chiefly, desirable for its own sake. The teaching of duties, there-

Post by “Don” of November 5, 2021 at 5:42 AM

Thanks for all that legwork, [Cassius](#)



[Epicurus: in outline and in history](#)

<p>This chapter has two aims. First, it provides an overview of the basics of Epicureanism. It therefore reviews the Epicurean adaptation of atomism,...

www.elgaronline.com

Came across this book chapter online and liked the way the author lays it out overall:

Quote

To claim that pleasure is good, then, does not mean imagining that all pleasures are equally good (Jones, 1989: 49–50). Epicureans therefore distinguished between two categories (Mitsis, 1988: 45–51; Preuss, 1994: Ch. 6).

Kinetic pleasures are non-necessary ‘pleasures in motion’ which depend upon change and process. Sensual pleasures of sight, touch, hearing and so forth seem to fall under this heading. A kinetic pleasure also seems to depend upon pain. If I enjoy reading a novel the enjoyment comes from anxious anticipation about how things will turn out. Will my favourite character die? Will the hero defeat the villain?

Katastematic pleasures are ‘pleasures at rest’ or in stasis, which implies an absence of disturbance or discomfort. They denote a state of being, involving equilibrium, calm, stability and completeness. Since they can be varied but cannot be quantitatively improved upon (as with the white loaf of bread) these are the highest pleasures and are sometimes known as ‘static pleasures’ (see *Epic IV.130–32*).

Though we should be wary of drawing an exact parallel, the *kinetic/katastematic* distinction is presumably what J.S. Mill had in mind when he praised Epicureanism and devised his own distinction between higher and lower pleasures as a way of evolving Utilitarianism beyond Bentham, for whom all pleasures *were* equally good (Arangno, 2013: 201, 203–204; Wilson, 2009: 280).¹²

But there is an important difference. Mill was more willing to identify the higher with one set of activities and the lower with another set. For Mill, poetry simply was superior to pushpin, as anyone who had experienced and been educated in the former could tell you.

For Epicureanism things are not quite that simple (Rist, 1972: 108-109, 115). Even if the *kinetic* are lower (though this is a proposition we will interrogate in Chapter 2), this does not mean we should disdain them (as Mill seems to disdain pushpin) for three reasons.

Firstly, as materialists Epicureans were receptive to the delights which we experience when the senses are stimulated. A good game of pushpin enjoyed with friends is presumably better than reading bad poetry in solitude.

Secondly, therefore, even if *kinetic* pleasures do invite pain and disturbances, these may be worth experiencing. The short-term anxiety caused by reading my novel may be worthwhile if the result leaves me in a higher, long-term state of *katastematic* pleasure than I would have experienced otherwise.

Finally, the above arguments suggest that *kinetic* pleasures may be valuable for their own sake. Seeking variations in pleasure *is* important if a life is to go well. Epicurus' distinction between adding pleasure and varying pleasure may not hold if and when variation itself constitutes a form of addition. If we can derive simple, untroubling enjoyment from *kinetic* activities then they may add to life's richness. (This is an argument we pursue in the next chapter under *Puzzle 3*.)

The *kinetic* and *katastematic* are therefore intermingled to a degree that does not appear true of Mill's lower/higher distinction. What matters is not just what we do but the reasons why we do what we do (Jones, 1989: 51).

Display More

Here's the pushpin referred to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Push-pin ...%29?wprov=sfla1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Push-pin...%29?wprov=sfla1)

Post by "Cassius" of November 5, 2021 at 8:27 AM

Quote

To claim that pleasure is good, then, does not mean imagining that all pleasures are equally good (Jones, 1989: 49–50).

OK right off the bat I say to that writer -- NO! Clearly Epicurus says that all pleasure are good, and all pains are bad -- yes you have to drill down, but this is where I think Godfrey is clearly correct because now the emphasis is on choiceworthiness and desire, but that doesn't mean that they still aren't "good" in the sense of pleasing. I know that we are now going down the rabbit hole of the meaning of "good," but in these philosophical discussions I strongly think that unless we generally refer to "good" as meaning "good in itself" then we never get anywhere in being clear.

Quote

Epicureans therefore distinguished between two categories (Mitsis, 1988: 45–51; Preuss, 1994: Ch. 6).

I also of course question this. D.L. did so, per the quote above. Cicero did so. But show me an instance of an authoritative EPICUREAN doing that distinguishing.

As I read the rest of that I won't comment in as much detail other than to say that I don't doubt that Mill and Bentham were struggling with their formulations because they were in fact trying to distinguish higher and lower pleasures - which means that they were looking for a standard other than pleasure itself.

Unfortunately I have to say that the entire analysis of that excerpt strikes me as totally disastrous, for the reason that is explained amply in [Philebus](#).

Once anyone starts down the road of saying that some pleasures are "more good" or "higher" or "lower" than others, then you are introducing into the discussion the strong implication that there is another standard - a standard outside of pleasure itself, by which you can rank pleasures into "more good" or "less good" or "higher" or "lower" or "more noble" or "less noble." You are then inevitably led to the conclusion that the "art of distinguishing the higher from the lower" is more important than pleasure itself. And what is the "art of distinguishing the higher and the lower"? Of course it's WISDOM (even call it PRUDENCE if you like) -- which are VIRTUES -- and you are led to conclude, as [Philebus](#) surrendered and concluded, that wisdom is the true target of life and not pleasure.

This thread is advancing my thoughts on this topic for the reason I stated to Kalosyni: *"We all can feel at times what it means to "rest" and to have a "good attitude" and a "positive outlook" and similar emotions and feelings. We know that those are important to us, and so when we read (from the commentators!!!) that Epicurus was really interested in "resting" pleasures, we presume "Oh that makes sense and I totally agree!" and we end up endorsing the "kinetic /*

katastematic distinction" as if it were a really important part of Epicurean philosophy."

So I strongly think that was these commentators are doing. They are so immersed into the "psychological" or even "clinical" perspective that they assure themselves that because they identify in their own minds background feelings which they think are important, and they want to find that in Epicurus, they grasp at these few lines from DL and from Epicurus and say "See, *this is where the Epicureans said what we modern psychologists say!*" But they are trying to graft that psychological viewpoint on top of the foundational philosophic battle over these words and goals that was going on between Stoics and Epicureans after Epicurus himself was long dead. The danger in doing so is that if you start playing around with the debate about "the good" (which is what so much of Greek philosophy was all about) by changing it around to fit one's views of psychology, then you make it impossible to see what the foundational argument was all about.

We're continuing to go back and forth on this issue of whether pleasures can be "ranked" in our individual lives, or chosen between in daily life. Of course they can and should be chosen between, all pleasures are not exactly the same in every respect. But the very definition of pleasure is that it "feels good" to us and if some fundamental meaning is put on "good" of the "feels good" other than "pleasant," then you're implying that there is a standard outside and superior to pleasure.

So I assert that it is foundational that "all pleasures are good" and that cannot convey any meaning other than that "all pleasures are pleasing." It makes sense to say "some pleasures are more pleasing than others" because that is how we feel them to be (duration, intensity, etc). But to vaguely say that "some pleasures are more good than others" implies that there is a standard of choiceworthiness other than how pleasing they are.

Yes in strictly Epicurean terms we can define "pleasing" and "good" to mean exactly the same thing, and we can use those words interchangeably.

But the world is full of Stoics and Platonists and Peripatetics, and they assuredly do NOT mean "pleasing" and "good" to mean exactly the same thing. We as Epicureans are a very small minority, and if we don't make this distinction clear then we get swept up in the tide of Platonism and lose any claim to distinctiveness.

So the concluding lines of that excerpt are in my mind pure Platonism/Stoicism: "What matters is not just what we do but the reasons why we do what we do (Jones, 1989: 51)." That's where you end up, just like [Philebus](#), when you decide to rank pleasures as "lower" or "higher" on a scale outside of pleasure itself (Lower or higher here implying "less noble" or "more noble.")

I would say strongly no to that last sentence of the excerpt -- "the reasons why we do what we do" rings of "virtue" ---What matters is not the "reason" (our understanding of "wisdom" or of "why") but the actual practical result - whether our lives are pleasing or not. Yes we want wisdom in order to produce pleasure, but what "matters" is the result (pleasure) not the too (wisdom).

Post by “Cassius” of November 5, 2021 at 9:35 AM

Just as an aside, I am at peace with the idea that if I live for another 30 years into my doddering old age I will still be engaged in this precise debate til the very end.

There's no getting around it: people come to the discussion thinking about their own experiences, and they have their own definitions. I do that too.

But in order to be able to carry on a clear conversation, we have to take a lot of time to explain what the words mean in a particular context. Most of the good people who are smart enough to reject the mainstream and come to the study of Epicurus know enough to realize that the mainstream doesn't make sense, but they haven't taken seriously what the Platonists and Stoics were really saying. They don't get the implications of "virtue is its own reward" and what "good in itself" is really talking about. They think that the Platonists and Stoics and everyone else just wants to live a happy life, and the only thing that separates us is the details of how to get there.

I want to be clear that I don't think I am smarter than other people and I certainly could be wrong, but until you go through the details of the Platonic arguments in [Philebus](#) and elsewhere I don't think most people today will appreciate the differences and the depth of the word game that's involved in explaining those differences.

And that means that for the six or so years that this website has existed we have gone round and round on that issue. No matter how long it continues to exist into the future, and so long as new people come to the discussion, it will be necessary to go into it over and over again.

So I hope we all enjoy the ride and maybe every time we go through it we can find new and better ways to explain what it's all about.

The time to worry would be if we don't have this discussion, because that would indicate we are stagnant and not expanding.

Post by “Cassius” of November 5, 2021 at 9:55 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Just as an aside, I am at peace with the idea that if I live for another 30 years into my doddering old age I will still be engaged in this precise debate til the very end.

But that doesn't mean I want to do it exactly the same way, over and over. This is probably where it makes sense to develop a way to convey the shade of meaning used in a particular context, so that it is clear for example when someone means "good-in-and-of-itself" or "good-as-desirable-for-the-moment-as-a-tool" or "good-as-pleasant." And I am sure there are more shades of meaning that are important to set out.

Likewise we need to be more clear on:

- (1) the relationship of "feeling" and "sense" and what it means to "experience" something.
- (2) the shades of meaning of "pleasure," including the issue of comparatively choosing between different pleasures.

If we can come up with a set of key issues for discussion we can start separate threads on each and maybe eventually find a way to make them "required reading" for new people at the forum.

Post by “Don” of November 5, 2021 at 11:18 PM

[Cassius](#) : First, your passion is apparent, appreciated, and completely understandable.

I'd like to address your last few posts above in a tangential way and then state why I "liked the way the author lays it out overall" in that article I posted. I don't necessarily expect you to agree with me, but it might at least give you (and any curious readers) a better idea where my head is at.

For me:

- There are obviously different kinds of activities that bring pleasure discerned simply by observation.
- Categorizing two broad categories as *katastematic* and *kinetic* doesn't bother me, especially since Diogenes Laertius quotes both Metrodorus and Epicurus himself in Lives, X:136, that pleasure can be experienced, let's say, *katastematically* and *kinetically*:

Metrodorus in his Timocrates, whose actual words are : "Thus pleasure being conceived both as that species which consists in motion and that which is a state of rest." (κίνησιν καὶ τῆς καταστηματικῆς (kinesin and [tes] katastematikes)) The words of Epicurus in his work On

Choice are : "Peace of mind and freedom from pain are pleasures which imply a state of rest ; joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity." (ὁ δ' Ἐπίκουρος ἐν τῷ Περὶ αἰρέσεων οὕτω λέγει: "ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀταραξία καὶ ἀπονία (ataraxia and aponia) καταστηματικά (katastematikai) εἰσιν ἡδοναί: ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη (khara and euphrosune) κατὰ κίνησιν (kinesin) ἐνεργεῖα βλέπονται.")

- Metrodorus and Epicurus are drawing a distinction between the philosophy of the Garden and the philosophy of Cyrenaics who appear to only recognize kinetic pleasures as the goal or the highest good. Epicurus (and Metrodorus) are quoted as saying, "No, pleasures encompass those gained from both kinds of pleasures."

- Ataraxia and aponia are specifically designated by Epicurus in On Choices as *καταστηματικά (katastematikai)*. This appears to mean in a stable state. It is related to [the word meaning 'bring to anchor,' bringing one to his destination.](#)

- [Khara](#) (joy/delight) and [euphrosune](#) (mirth/merriment/good cheer/cheered with glad thoughts) are defined by Epicurus as kinetic pleasure. Why? I don't know other than to say maybe your soul atoms are bouncing around more (they're kinetic) in response to the

pleasure; whereas they are stable (at anchor) while experiencing a katastematic pleasure.

- No value judgements that one is better than another.

Where I liked the article was:

Quote

To claim that pleasure is good, then, does not mean imagining that all pleasures are equally good

I interpreted this to mean "good [for you]" as [PD10](#). I realize I'm reading into the article's text, but that's the way I interpreted it.

I'll admit I have some misgivings about their characterization of kinetic pleasures. Going back to Epicurus, he states joy and merriment are kinetic pleasures, not pleasures from sight, touch, hearing, etc. You can get feelings of joy and merriment from any number of activities. Excitement might be a candidate from my perspective of pleasure derived through kinesis. I like their katastematic lines better:

Quote

Katastematic pleasures are 'pleasures at rest' or in stasis, which implies an absence of disturbance or discomfort. They denote a state of being, involving equilibrium, calm, stability and completeness.

That's the definition I'm coming around to to try and describe them.

I liked their repudiation of Mill. I also liked this:

Quote

For Epicureanism things are not quite that simple (Rist, 1972: 108-109, 115). Even if the kinetic are lower (though this is a proposition we will interrogate in Chapter 2), this does not mean we should disdain them (as Mill seems to disdain pushpin) for three reasons.

Firstly, as materialists Epicureans were receptive to the delights which we experience when the senses are stimulated.

This goes back to the idea that we can only experience pleasure when our senses interact with the external world at least in the kinetic pleasures. Katastematic pleasure can be experienced through internal sensations ([interoception](#) to channel Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett and others).

Quote

Finally, the above arguments suggest that kinetic pleasures may be valuable for their own sake. Seeking variations in pleasure is important if a life is to go well. ... If we can derive simple, untroubling enjoyment from kinetic activities then they may add to life's richness.

The kinetic and katastematic are therefore intermingled to a degree that does not appear true of Mill's lower/higher distinction. What matters is not just what we do but the reasons why we do what we do (Jones, 1989: 51).

So, kinetic and katastematic are NOT higher/lower, better/worse for Epicurus like they were Mill. They are simply ways of talking about the various ways pleasure is experienced.

Let's take the pleasure derived from intoxication. Epicurus wrote his Symposium (paraphrasing) "Don't act the fool when you're drunk", so I'm going to assume he didn't prohibit drinking. If one goes out drinking with friends to strengthen the bonds of friendship with no responsibilities the next day, I see no reason that's not a valid Epicurean choice. If you go out alone drinking when you have a big social or work commitment the next day, that would not be choice-worthy and would lead to more pain. The pleasure is the same (probably kinetic if we're keeping to the thread) but the *desires* to experience that pleasure are not equally choice-worthy.

So, that's where my head is at right now in regards to kinetic and katastematic.

Post by “Don” of November 5, 2021 at 11:20 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But show me an instance of an authoritative EPICUREAN doing that distinguishing.

[136] He differs from the Cyrenaics¹³⁶ with regard to pleasure. They do not include under the term the pleasure which is a state of rest, but only that which consists in motion. Epicurus admits both ; also pleasure of mind as well as of body, as he states in his work *On Choice and Avoidance* and in that *On the Ethical End*, and in the first book of his work *On Human Life* and in the epistle to his philosopher friends in Mytilene. So also Diogenes in the seventeenth book of his *Epilecta*, and Metrodorus in his *Timocrates*, whose actual words are : "Thus pleasure being conceived both as that species which consists in motion and that which is a state of rest." The words of Epicurus in his work *On Choice* are : "Peace of mind and freedom from pain are pleasures which imply a state of rest ; joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity." (Diogenes Laertius X.136)

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2021 at 6:47 AM

Good points as to those quotes, but without the surrounding context we don't have the important part of the assertion that is generally made, which is that pleasures of rest are superior and the goal of pleasures of action. In fact by the absence of those statements in these excerpts we have the opposite implication, that such conclusion does not exist. And the reason for DL looking for those excerpts to pull out is what [Nikolsky](#) explains - the division suggested by Carneades.

Note also this footnote from page 444 of the [Nikolsky](#) article, and the section it references;

¹⁷ 10.136. True, Diogenes refers to words by Epicurus himself; however, as I will try to show further on, he interprets them in a way different from what Epicurus originally meant.

So I think again we're basically in agreement as to our final interpretation, the issue is what is to be done with that interpretation. I know you are saying you don't see any harm in using it, and I agree, just so long as we all stay aware that the implications that some pleasures can by value judgment be determined to be higher or lower is not allowed to take root and grow, because THAT is the lever by which the Platonists seek to overturn the whole analysis. You don't do that yourself because you are now convinced that moral value judgments do not supercede pleasure (or at least I think you are 😊). But the majority of the world is not convinced of that, and they will immediately join the k-k distinction to the value judgment that

only katastematic is worth pursuing, and that is why you see that assertion in virtually every modern article written about Epicurus.

So there's a problem to be dealt with and I look forward to everyone's suggestions on how to do so. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of November 6, 2021 at 6:53 AM

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.

assertions of the

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 “Don” of November 6, 2021 at 7:34 AM

I'll have to go back and carefully read [Nikolsky](#). I was going to wing it but that's not fair to [Nikolsky](#) nor to this discussion.

I will share an analogy/metaphor that just struck me. As of right now (reserving the right to extend & revise etc), I think "pleasure" may be able to be thought of like "taste"; katastematic and kinetic may be able to be thought of as analogous here to salty, sweet, sour, bitter, or umami. Salty isn't better or higher than sour, just different. They're all tastes. This is only a metaphor to show how one thing can be categorized into smaller things without making value judgments. I'm not equating pleasure with the sense of taste, just trying to build a metaphor.

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2021 at 7:34 AM

... *De Fin.* 1.57; 2.6 and 32, etc.

⁸⁸ I am indebted to Prof. David Sedley for the careful reading of a previous version of this paper and his many helpful comments, to my father Michael Nikolsky for his assistance in translating the paper into English, and to C. J. Rowe and Gregory Dashevsky whose valuable suggestions have helped me greatly in improving my style and argumentation.

Post by "Don" of November 6, 2021 at 8:07 AM

... or maybe pleasure is an apple and katastematic and kinesis can be thought of like red and sweet.

Still working on an apt metaphor.

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2021 at 8:52 AM

As long as "red" and "sweet" are not thought of as changing our definition of what an apple is, and are considered only as varieties of apples which are not intrinsically better or worse than others according to some outside value judgment, I would agree with that.

Also a variation would be caramel apples, dried apples, sliced apples, apple pie, etc --- with the point being that these are different ways in which apples can be enjoyed, but (1) not

intrinsically better or worse than another, but according to personal taste (how pleasant you feel it to be), and (2) without thinking that these varieties of ways to eat apples are somehow ordained by nature as categories in themselves which we have some intrinsic significance of their own (which might also imply some kind of natural ranking of worthiness).

Post by “Don” of August 31, 2022 at 8:50 AM

Diogenes in Book 2 has a lengthy bio of Aristippus with a summary of Cyrenaic philosophy and some contrasts with Epicurus:

[Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, BOOK II, Chapter 8. ARISTIPPUS \(c. 435-350 B.C.\)](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 31, 2022 at 3:13 PM

I forgot that I started this thread, and need to reread it. I have still been curious to understand the differences. Also, if there is something helpful within it's approach. (Pleasure in the present moment is the antidote to low-level anxiety arising out of uncertainty). Further study may lead me to an eclectic "Epicurean-Cyrenaic" understanding

Here is a website which references Cyrenaic writings:

[The Cyrenaics Resource \[The Lucian of Samosata Project\]](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 31, 2022 at 3:20 PM

Here is a blog which explores Cyrenaicism and compares it to Epicureanism, by Jordan Crago.

[Basic Introduction to Cyrenaic Philosophy](#)

Cyrenaicism, or the Cyrenaic school of philosophy, is named after the North African city of Cyrene, where the movement existed during the la...

newcyrenaicism.blogspot.com

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 1, 2022 at 9:02 AM

This also by Jordan Crago:

Quote

...Aristippus prided himself on his mastery over the pleasures he indulged, ensuring that he never made the mistake of believing a particular source of pleasure to be essential to his happiness, which allowed him to forego it if needed. For example, Aristippus said that he possessed the infamous courtesan Laïs, but that he was not possessed by her, and that “what is best is not abstaining from pleasures, but instead controlling them without being controlled.” This ability to indulge pleasure but also forego it, for example, if it will ultimately bring you greater pain in its wake, brought Aristippus a sense of freedom and self-mastery.

Like later Cyrenaics, Aristippus held that bodily pleasure was greater than mental pleasure. This seems plausible, for who would argue that the memory of fine food rivals the eating of fine food in enjoyment? Nevertheless, Aristippus put great stock by the avoidance of mental suffering. Indeed, part of Aristippus’ teaching on never becoming dependent on a particular source of pleasure, which is to say, seeing them as essential to your happiness, has to do with avoiding the distress you would feel if you lost that pleasure.

...The next Cyrenaic virtue I’ll discuss is temperance, which Aristippus defines as disdaining excess. The following letter written by Aristippus to his daughter illustrates Cyrenaic temperance. He is advising his daughter on how to react to the local government threatening to seize her properties: “I instruct you to manage this business with the rulers in such a way that my advice benefits you. That advice was not to desire what is excessive. In this way you’ll live out your life in the best fashion, if you’re disdainful of every excess. Those men will never wrong you so much that you’ll be in want, since you still have the two orchards, and they suffice even for a luxurious life. Even if only the property in Berenice were left, it wouldn’t fail to support an excellent lifestyle.”

Aristippus reminds his daughter that although she will lose some land, she will still have some left, and what remains is sufficient for a luxurious lifestyle. Now, for those of us who own no property, this anecdote isn’t enormously relatable. However, Aristippus does insist that “Those men will never wrong you so much that you’ll be in want”, which implies that even if the government seized all her properties, rather than just some, she would still have enough to be happy.

What Aristippus is implying, I think, is that although luxuries add spice to happiness, they are not ultimately essential to it. Another anecdote supports this idea: "Since you share this pleasant lifestyle with those women, let the officials in Cyrene wrong you as much as they want: they won't wrong you with respect to your natural end". This reminds me very much of Epicureanism, which is unsurprising since Epicurus was so influenced by the Cyrenaics.

In particular, I'm reminded of the Epicurean distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires. Some desires are necessary to the pleasant life, for example, one's basic bio-psychological needs (food, water, shelter, friends), but others are unnecessary to the pleasant life, i.e. desires for luxuries. For Epicurus as for Aristippus, I suggest, luxuries add variety to the pleasant life, but one could still live pleasantly without them. The difference being, of course, that Epicurus taught voluntary asceticism from luxuries, whereas Aristippus taught controlled indulgence of them.

Thus, we might say that to desire excess is to desire what you cannot have. The importance of disdaining excess lay in the danger of undermining enjoyment in what you have available to you by replacing it with unhappy longing and toiling for what you don't have, which is hedonistically irrational. Disdaining excess, then, offers an antidote to the unnecessary unhappiness of those who have everything they need to be happy — basic needs and, for most people, a ton of luxuries to boot — but who nevertheless make themselves unhappy by desiring what can't be had.

<https://jordancrago.medium.com/how-to-be-a-cyrenaic-d6b06041beb0>

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Just adding this in here, as it has some usefulness. And to further see how this is beneficial:

When a particular thing that we want is very difficult or impossible to get or we have lost something that we thought was very pleasurable and can no longer get it, then we may feel angry or sad (and also may begin to feel feelings of hopelessness) -- then we need to survey the situation and see some important truths about happiness -- that our own happiness doesn't depend on just one thing -- happiness comes from multiple sources. So we can then stop "knocking our head against a wall" with regard to a certain thing that we want and can't get -- and not be so uptight about it. Further down the line we may decide that it is still something to put effort into achieving, and we can go about it clear-headed. Or we may simply see that we really don't need that thing as much as we thought we did, and so creatively pursue other enjoyments in life.

I think it is important to remember that this isn't the easiest to impliment -- there may be a feeling of internal resistance (I want what I want, no matter what!). But unlike Buddhism (which appears to me to teach "letting go, doing nothing, and having no further desires") I see this as different in that we are active and seek out new pleasure and enjoyments to replace what we can't have or have lost. So the emphasis is on personal responsibility and freedom -- making

choices and taking actions that lead to enjoyment and happiness.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 1, 2022 at 9:25 AM

I think I better add in here that if a person interprets the Epicurean principles to be "tranquility is the goal" (as it appears that the above blogger J. Crago does) then it will appear that there are more differences between the ethical Epicurean and Cyrenaic teachings. There are however more differences between the epistemology of each one, than the ethical. I think it would be right to say that Cyrenaic leans toward skeptical and Epicureanism is empirical.

Here on this forum we use the Epicurean principles and interpret the "why" of pleasure to lead to our goal of the fullness of pleasure. And so we wouldn't agree with some of the points that J. Crago put forth on Epicureanism.

It does seem that Cyrenaic philosophy puts more emphasis on pleasure in the present compared to Epicureanism.

Post by “Cassius” of September 1, 2022 at 12:05 PM

Yes as to the last post. Here is the excerpt from one of Jordan's posts that we discussed this past Wednesday night:

Quote

Indeed, it was through Epicurus that I discovered and became attracted to philosophical hedonism as a pragmatic way of life. However, like many others, I eventually grew disappointed with Epicurus' philosophy because of his strange and paradoxically ascetic hedonism — for Epicurus, pleasure is merely the absence of pain, particularly the mental pain of anxiety. In other words, Epicureanism is a form of *negative hedonism* which values the avoidance of pain over the seeking of pleasure. Whatever merits an analgesic philosophy like this might have, it certainly wasn't my ideal of hedonism. Indeed, I was delighted when I read that a contemporaneous hedonist school made fun of Epicureanism by saying that this state of absence of pain is the condition of a corpse!

And that witticism is how I discovered the Cyrenaic school.

I think Jordan is wrong in that paragraph to characterize Epicurus the way he does, but Jordan is in good company - it's my understanding that this is the reasoning that led Nietzsche away from Epicurus too.

The phrase "strange and paradoxically ascetic hedonism" is the key. Yes, there is something "strange and paradoxical" going on, but the issue is not in Epicurus, but in the mainstream way he is interpreted. Yes you can isolate a couple of passages in the letter to Menoeceus and conclude that Epicurus taught "valuing the avoidance of pain over the seeking of pleasure." But when you read the WHOLE philosophy and the many texts that do not at all support such an interpretation, then it becomes possible to see that those passages in the letter to Menoeceus are not really saying what it appears in isolation that they are saying.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 1, 2022 at 2:06 PM

Here is another good entry on Cyrenaic philosophy from online Britannica:

Quote

Cyrenaic, adherent of a Greek school of [moral philosophy](#), active around the turn of the 3rd century bc, which held that the [pleasure](#) of the moment is the [criterion](#) of goodness and that the good life consists in rationally manipulating situations with a view to their hedonistic (or pleasure-producing) utility.

The school was called Cyrenaic because [Cyrene](#) in [North Africa](#) was the centre of its activity and the birthplace of several of its members. Although the elder [Aristippus](#), a pupil of [Socrates](#), was generally recognized as its founder, its flourishing occurred at a later date, probably at the end of the 4th century bc.

According to the Cyrenaics, a man knows that things external to himself exist because they have an effect upon him, but he can know nothing about their nature. All that he can perceive is the way in which he himself is affected by them; how other men are affected is unknown. The fact that two men give the same name to their experiences is no guarantee of identity. Thus, the only admissible objective of action is to ensure that one's own affections are pleasant. The three possible conditions of the human constitution are violent change, gentle change, and [stability](#). The first is accompanied by [pain](#), the second by pleasure, the last by neither. Man must avoid the first and seek the second; it is a mistake to suppose that the third is pleasant or desirable. Moreover, the pleasure to be sought is that of the moment; only present experience can give present pleasure. Happiness, the sum of pleasures, is to be valued because it includes

momentary pleasures, which are like in kind, their relative value depending only on their intensity. Bodily pleasures (and pains) are more intense than those of the mind. Nevertheless, the latter were recognized and even held to include some that have an altruistic aspect; e.g., joy in the prosperity of one's country. To be stronger than pleasure is a true Socratic ideal and distinguishes the Cyrenaic from the wastrel.

Three Cyrenaics made [innovations](#) important enough to give their names to followers. Theodorus denied that pleasures and pains are good or bad. His aim was mental cheerfulness and the gift of wisdom, which he considered sufficient for [happiness](#). Hegesias, like Theodorus, doubted the power of reason to procure pleasures and so advised avoidance of pain; much pain of mind could be avoided by regarding such things as poverty and riches, slavery and freedom, death and life as matters of indifference. Finally, [Anniceris](#) revived the original doctrines with some additions.

The [ethical](#) doctrines of the later Cyrenaics were, in due time, incorporated bodily into the teachings of [Epicurus](#), founder of a later school of ethical [philosophy](#).

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cyrenaic>

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With all this good material, I am thinging a table of comparisons could be created.

Post by "Cassius" of September 1, 2022 at 4:33 PM

Yes a table of comparisons would be good, especially if it would help us prioritize the differences in order of importance.

I have always considered the "Cyreniacs want pleasure NOW" difference to be overstated - I would have to think that if they were here to defend themselves we would find that that allegation is an oversimplification and that they would have an answer for the criticism.

More to the point is that I would gather than being closer to Socrates, they were probably more theistic and not at all into the atomism that forms the basis of the Epicurean affirmation that there is no supernatural realm and no life after death. Where the Cyreniacs stood on epistemology is also something of a mystery.

It's impossible for me to believe that Epicurus was taking a step "backward" into any form of asceticism. More likely, he was developing and extending the arguments against other Socratic/Platonic positions, while keeping the emphasis on pleasure and pain as the guides of nature, and extending the emphasis to ALL kinds of pleasure and pain, including mental as at least as significant as physical pain and pleasure.