

# "Objection Your Honor! Attorney Cicero Is Mischaracterizing the Testimony To Mislead The Jury! The Evidence Is Clear: Not Only Is "Ataraxia" Not The Highest Pleasure - Ataraxia Alone Is Not A Pleasure At All!

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2018 at 2:11 PM

This is the discussion thread associated with the article "[Objection Your Honor! Attorney Cicero Is Mischaracterizing the Testimony To Mislead The Jury! The Evidence Is Clear: Not Only Is "Ataraxia" Not The Highest Pleasure - Ataraxia Alone Is Not A Pleasure At All!](#)"

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Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2018 at 6:19 AM

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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.

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And I think that conclusion applies to at least a significant number of the modern commentators who can see the same thing that [Nikolsky](#), Wenham, and Gosling & Taylor see, yet who still argue that the Epicurean goal of life amounts to an absence of pleasure as that term is ordinarily understood.

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## Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2018 at 7:56 AM

"Do any of the three letters written by Epicurus mention or explain static versus dynamic pleasures? If not, then it is not essential. How about the principle doctrines? Even so, a list of doctrines is never as clear, as a letter. If not then it is not Epicurus himself. Not essential."

<<< To me that is the key and the start of the analysis. The great majority of this k/k analysis comes from Cicero with a little added personal commentary from Diogenes Laertius, which was probably written hundreds of years later even than Cicero. We don't have anything within 200+ years of Epicurus himself that even hints that Epicurus considered a distinction between "static" and "active" to be helpful. And if Epicurus dealt with it at all, it's a safe bet that he did so only to unwind the **\*\*harm\*\*** of thinking about pleasure as static, and to refute Plato, just as Wenham and [Nikolsky](#) indicate. The letter to Menoecus, where this k/k category would certainly have been discussed if it were significant, does not devote a word to it. Instead it says the opposite - ALL pleasure is desirable, not some pleasures intrinsically more than others, or some pleasures intrinsically for the sake of others.

The only way to read this k/k distinction into Menoecus is to presume that "absence of pain" means a state of non-feeling, and therefore "absence of pain" means "katastematic" under a different name. That's not just wrong, but absurd, given the clear intent of the rest of the letter and many other reliable statements that pleasure is a feeling we all recognize by nature, not an "absence of" anything else. Pain is to be avoided so that we can experience pleasure, not so we can experience a state of non-feeling. Any attempt to describe the pleasures that we experience when we are living without pain is simply a list of ordinary and familiar mental and bodily pleasures.

But I will go further than to say that "it is not essential." It's not just non-essential, it is terribly harmful to a philosophy based on feeling to state or imply that a state of non-feeling is the goal of life. That is sabotage of the highest order, the kind of thing with have to expect from a master lawyer with an agenda to defeat and wipe out Epicurean philosophy - which it has very nearly succeeded in doing.