

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

Post by “Cassius” of October 10, 2023 at 7:02 PM

Welcome to Episode 196 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we continue our discussion of Books One and Two of Cicero's On Ends, which are largely devoted to Epicurean Philosophy. "On Ends" contains important criticisms of Epicurus that have set the tone for standard analysis of his philosophy for the last 2000 years. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#)

We are using the Reid edition, so check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

As we proceed we will keep track of Cicero's arguments and outline them here:

[Cicero's Objections to Epicurean Philosophy](#)

Last week we started discussion of Section IV and this week we will pick up at the same place and deal with Cicero's argument as he pursues his argument that Epicurus does not know what he means when he talks about pleasure:

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57252258>

Post by “Cassius” of October 13, 2023 at 12:52 PM

Ok - In listening again to Episode 195, I think we had a great conversation. However I think there is a lot more to say, so as we start 196 i expect to take us back over some of the same

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3417-episode-196-the-epicurean-arguments-in-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-06/>

points, especially:

When we consider the Letter to Menoecus TOGETHER with PDO3, I would say that we have to be firm both on both the overall organism level and as to individual feelings. We're not talking ONLY about the limit of quantity of pleasure being the absence of pain, but we are talking about any individual desirable feeling as being called by either of the names "pleasure" OR "absence of pain" - in other words that the terms are interchangeable.

This latter point is more clear from the letter to Menoecus: "By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul.". This is not directed toward the limit of the quantity of pleasure, as in the first sentence of [PD03](#), but to what is said in the second sentence.

Torquatus is hammering this point over and over, but we can't leave it ambiguous:

1 - The theoretical goal is 100% pleasure / 0% pain, because it's obvious nothing can be more complete than 100%. When looking at your whole life "in sum," the logical goal for your life as a whole is 100% pleasure / 0% pain. Of course we know it is canonical Epicurus that we sometimes choose pain when that leads to more pleasure or less overall pain, so the 100% / 0% goal is a "whole organism" perspective, and not an inflexible rule that says at every moment that your "prime directive" is to make sure you never experience a moment of pain. You look to all the consequences and you act accordingly.

AND -

2 - Every step along the way, in any discrete moment / part / feeling / experience of your life, what you are feeling / experiencing is registered as either pleasure or pain, and that there is no "neutral" or third or fourth or any other kind of experience that does not fall under pleasure or pain. If you are not feeling pain, what you are feeling is pleasure, full stop, end of need to look for any other high-level label. Any feeling that we find to be desirable is equally describing as "pleasure" or "absence of pain" at this high level of analysis.

We then to hammer home that analysis and then go back over why the example of Hieronymus of Rhodes illustates this equivalence through the different positions that the two philosophers are taking.

If anyone has suggestions on ways to illustrate these points we will be glad to incorporate them into the upcoming podcast.

Post by "Cassius" of October 14, 2023 at 3:33 AM

Please check my math and let me know if you see an error:

Pleasure Arithmetic and "Absence of Pain"

=====

1. There are only two feelings of body or mind: those which are agreeable (pleasure) and those which are disagreeable (pain). Let's call pleasure "A" and pain "B." (It should not be necessary to say that we are including both "body" and "mind," since we are a single organism, but since many people seem to insist on thinking in those two terms, let's be clear that everything said here refers to *both*.)
2. If a person is alive and feeling anything, what he is feeling is either "A" pleasure or "B" pain.
3. "All" the feelings of life = "A" + "B." Let's call all the feelings of life "C." $A + B = C$
4. "All" the feelings of life means 100% of them. There is no logical way to increase "C" past the total of "A" + "B."
5. Any feeling of agreeable "stimulation" is a pleasure. Everyone admits this. Let's call this type of pleasure "A1".
6. Any non-painful feeling is a pleasure. Not everyone admits this, but this is the logical deduction of points 1 and 2. Let's call this type of pleasure "A2". This does not refer to "stimulation," but instead refers to the normal and healthy feeling of life when no pain or disease is present. Neither A1 nor A2 are intrinsically "better" than the other for all people at all times. Both are part of life and both require prudence and activity to sustain.
7. The most pleasure possible in life is when 100% of life ("C") is composed totally of pleasure, which means 100% A (pleasure, either A1 or A2 or both) and 0% B (pain). We can call this type of life "HP" (the "height of pleasure" or "the highest pleasure" or the "limit of pleasure").
8. If $C = A + B$ (all feelings of life = the pleasurable feelings + the painful feelings) then $A = C - B$. This is another way of saying that the quantity of pleasurable feelings in life is the same as the quantity of feelings in life in which pain is absent. Any feeling of pleasure can therefore be referred to as a feeling of "absence of pain," and any feeling of pain can be referred to as a feeling of "absence of pleasure." This is not a complete description of a particular feeling, any more than the word "pleasure" is a complete description of ice cream or sex. *From this perspective, "absence of pain" provides us a single term that describes any and all types of desirable experience, since "absence of pain" includes both A1 (any agreeable stimulation of body or mind + A2 (any non-painful normal experience of body or mind).*
9. The most desirable life (which we called "HP" above) is completely pleasure (A1 + A2 with no amount of B), which means a life in which pain is absent. *From this perspective, "absence of pain" provides us a single term that describes our goal for life.*

10. "Absence of pain" can be used to refer to either "the goal of life" or "any and all types of desirable feelings." Just like the word "Pleasure," which can refer either to "the goal of life" or "any and all types of desirable feeling," the term "absence of pain" has two meanings, depending on which perspective is being discussed.

11. "Absence of pain" does not mean or imply "absence of feeling" or "absence of pleasure." Instead, "absence of pain" refers to any number of pleasurable feelings from a discrete single experience of pleasure all the way up to a total life which is full of pleasures unaccompanied by pains. Therefore when we say that the goal of life is absence of pain, we are not following the gross error of Hieronymous of Rhodes and others who say that the goal of life has nothing to do with pleasure, we are following Epicurus and saying that the goal of life has everything to do with pleasure.

EDIT NOTE: The first version of this post had "experience" in the place of what is now listed as "feeling." This change was made to tighten up the wording - see posts 8 and 9 in this thread below.

Post by “Don” of October 14, 2023 at 5:56 AM

I see where you're going, but let me provide the following possible revision or at least offer this to get your math didn't in my mind.

To recap:

A = pleasure (pleasurable sensation/positive affect)

B = pain (painful sensation/negative affect)

A1 = "Any experience of agreeable "stimulation"" (ie, kinetic pleasure)

A2 = "normal and healthy experience of life" (ie, katastematic pleasure)

A = (A1 + A2)

C the totality of experience in one's life.

HP is defined as "most pleasure possible in life is when 100% of life ("C") is composed totally of pleasure, which means 100% A (pleasure, either A1 or A2 or both) and 0% B (pain)"

Let's even give B the benefit of the doubt and say B1 is pain in the body and B2 is pain in the mind...

$$C = (A1 + A2) + (B1 + B2)$$

The height/fullness of pleasure would then be:

$$C - (B1 + B2) = (A1 + A2)$$

Or using HP as 100% pleasure in C...

$$HP = C - (B1 + B2) = (A1 + A2)$$

or

HP = (A1 + A2) height/fullness of pleasure is just 100% pleasure

HP = C - (B1 + B2) height/fullness of pleasure is the totality of life without any pain of body or mind

Since we're not gods, we can't achieve HP all the time, but we can experience moments of it. Even Epicurus admitted he felt the pain of his final illness, he just valued his positive memories more highly than the pain and took comfort in a life well-lived. Maybe I'd arithmeticize his experience as:

$$A1 + A2 + B2 > B1$$

Hmmm.... But pain in the body B1 is the absence of pleasure in the body but neither A1 nor A2 map neatly onto mind and body since memories can be a kinetic pleasure. The Pleasure Math is an imperfect science but for now I'll stop with

$$A1 + A2 + B2 > B1$$

Post by "Cassius" of October 14, 2023 at 7:36 AM

Yes I would agree that this takes us to exactly the same place, if we insist on the accustomed viewpoint of looking at feelings of body and mind separately. That's why I included my note in number one that most people are going to look at them separately, but the issue of whether their activity is pleasure or pain is the same. When you separate those out and refer to them as A1/A2 and B1/B2 you're right we arrive at the same place:

[Quote from Don](#)

HP = (A1 + A2) height/fullness of pleasure is just 100% pleasure

HP = C - (B1 + B2) height/fullness of pleasure is the totality of life without any pain of body or mind

And i agree that this is an added complexity that would arise due to ambiguities between the kinetic and katastematic terms:

[Quote from Don](#)

But pain in the body B1 is the absence of pleasure in the body but neither A1 nor A2 map neatly onto mind and body since memories can be a kinetic pleasure.

.... problems which i would put aside by considering those questions to be of secondary down-the-road importance, if that. I would leave those problems to those who really want to pursue whether Epicurus himself was concerned with this distinction at all, and I would go with Lucretius' approach and leave that for another book.

The real fundamental help that going through these steps provides under either scenario is that it explains how the term "absence of pain" can be used in a completely clear way. Seen this way, "absence of pain" is tied tightly to pleasure and describes both the ultimate goal of life as well as the sweeping nature of everything that is considered pleasure. No "woo" or mystery or implication of asceticism or devaluing of life, but rather a clear reference that brings within it any experience in life which is not painful.

Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2023 at 9:34 AM

I wrote my post #3 in the middle of the night, and when I read Don's post #4 I was half asleep. I failed to really be clear about this part which I would steer away from:

[Quote from Don](#)

A = pleasure (pleasurable sensation/positive affect)

B = pain (painful sensation/negative affect)

A1 = "Any experience of agreeable "stimulation"" (ie, kinetic pleasure)

A2 = "normal and healthy experience of life" (ie, katastematic pleasure)

I think the designation of A1 as kinetic and A2 as katastematic would not be helpful. Regardless of different readings of the texts, as I understand the situation the k/k terminology is not nearly as well establishable in the core Epicurus and Lucretius texts as is the discussion of the difference between "stimulation" vs "absence of pain / normal experience of life." The problems that result from this k/k classification include for example exactly the one Don mentions in his post, that the "kinetic/katastematic" distinction does not map directly onto the distinction between stimulation vs normal painfree life.

The summoning up and savoring of memories is mental, and though we don't think of that usually as an "action" experience, it does fall under the category of an action as I understand the authorities. Action is not merely physical change but also includes mental change, and so (again as I understand the authorities) stopping and starting to think about distinct memories is considered kinetic, as is any process that involves "change of state" rather than "static state." Diving into whether the pleasure involved is "changeable" or "static" introduces complexities that are not needed for the overall analysis of whether pleasure predominates over pain.

The big hurdle to get over and the reason for discussion is to understand what "absence of pain" means. Resolving the issue that we should seek the predominance of all types of pleasures over all types of pain resolves the biggest issues in controversy as to what the goal of life is. As I see it, the prime objective should be first is to identify and have confidence on the desired goal. Once we do that, then the question can turn to which individual pleasures to pursue under a particular circumstance. And that's going to be more of a practical fact-specific question than a theoretical issue.

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 14, 2023 at 9:47 AM

Some questions:

Is there ever any benefit to deciding to label something as being "neither pleasure nor pain"? Does the experience of "neither pleasure nor pain" happen spontaneously or do we decide to label it that way after the fact?

Also, 100% pain is very rare but might occur while physically experiencing something catastrophic (a car accident or being hit by a bomb).

How much of our experience (and how much of the time) is there an equal mix of both pain and pleasure? (A1 + B2) or (A2 + B1) ...and might there be times when these are considered "neither pleasure nor pain" since they cancel each other out?

How often is the sum of our experience just what we decide to tell ourselves (or label things as being either "good" or "bad")?

Post by “Joshua” of October 14, 2023 at 9:54 AM

I'm not sure you can say that 6 is a logical deduction of 1 and 2 absent a definition of 'experience', and an explanation of how that word relates to 'feeling'.

If 6 held that "Any non-painful feeling is a pleasure" it would be a deductive conclusion of 1 and 2.

That feelings are discrete does not necessarily mean that experiences are; they could be composites of multiple feelings. I just think the word experience is over-broad for this kind of thing.

"How was your week in Paris?"

"Oh, it was a wonderful experience!"

Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2023 at 10:15 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

if 6 held that "Any non-painful feeling is a pleasure" it would be a deductive conclusion of 1 and 2.

Good point. Will change most every word "experience" to "feeling." That also will address the points in the remainder of your post I think....

While I think in normal discussion the word "experience" equates to "feeling," there is no reason to introduce that ambiguity in this list of points. All that was previously stated as "experience" will now be changed to "feeling."

While [we know that the position that there are only two feelings and we are experiencing either one or the other is the Epicurean position](#), for persuasiveness purposes we will still need to hammer the point that Kalosyni is wanting to raise: *Can we experience something without an associated feeling?*

Cicero says we can, Torquatus/Epicurus says we cannot. As far as I can tell, every single reference to the question in the core texts backs up Torquatus/Epicurus that this is the Epicurean position.

Now as to WHY that is the Epicurean position, that's a separate but highly important question. I would say it is because of Epicurus' philosophic conclusions about life (life is desirable, so life in the absence of pain is pleasurable) but there are probably other ways of reaching the same conclusion. It is a plus (but not determinative of the question) that modern clinical researchers seem to take the same position (a point which Don and Godfrey are all over.) See posts in [this](#) subforum and many others which are not linked there as of yet.

One additional point on this from the letter to Menoeceus: "And therefore a right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality."

I have not previously interpreted it this way, but that underlined portion may be exactly the point: *it is the right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) that makes a mortal life enjoyable*. It is thinking through these issues philosophically that makes us realize that even when we are not being stimulated, the simple and normal act of living is understood to be pleasurable. If we don't understand this, then we wander in indifference and doubt and question the value of life and we flirt with Stoicism or Nihilism or worse. If we do understand it, then the wise man can experience a constant predominance of pleasure over pain.

Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2023 at 12:48 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

While we know that the position that there are only two feelings and we are experiencing either one or the other is the Epicurean position, for persuasiveness purposes we will still need to hammer the point that Kalosyni is wanting to raise: Can we experience something without an associated feeling?

It's clear we need to go back over this point. WHY is this position seemingly of such importance to Epicurus. I think there are probably several answers but we need to make them clear.

Post by “Pacatus” of October 14, 2023 at 4:05 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

How often is the sum of our experience just what we decide to tell ourselves (or label things as being either "good" or "bad")?

Essentially Epicurus' strategy in his physically painful dying days.

Post by "Pacatus" of October 14, 2023 at 5:02 PM

[Don](#): I love the syllogistic (deductive) analysis! Let me see if I can offer a possible solution to your closing "impasse" -

Both A1 and A2 can contain physical and mental components: as you put it, "neither A1 nor A2 map neatly onto mind and body since memories can be a kinetic pleasure." Let's call **A1p** physical kinetic pleasure, and **A1m** mental kinetic pleasure. Similarly, **A2p** is katastematic physical pleasure; and **A2m** is katastematic mental pleasure. So -

$$\mathbf{A} = \mathbf{A1} + \mathbf{A2} = [(\mathbf{A1p} + \mathbf{A1m}) + (\mathbf{A2p} + \mathbf{A2m})].$$

With that expansion, there seems to be no need to include B2 on the left-hand side. A sum-state of pleasure becomes simply:

$$(\mathbf{A1} + \mathbf{A2}) = [(\mathbf{A1p} + \mathbf{A1m}) + (\mathbf{A2p} + \mathbf{A2m})] - (\mathbf{B1} + \mathbf{B2}) > \mathbf{0}.$$

LATE EDIT: And there seems no need to specify that physical pleasure itself outweighs physical pain, or that mental pleasure outweighs mental pain -- especially since we already know that mental pleasure can potentially mitigate physical pain.

And the daily goal - choice by choice - is to **max A - B** (with attention to those internal components). And that is how one maximizes **A(C)** - which we could call *eudaimonia*?

+++++

Question: Can B1 and B2 also have katastematic qualities? For example, chronic physical pain or clinical depression?

+++++

Okay, my brain is cracked. 😄

Post by "Kalosyni" of October 14, 2023 at 6:42 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3417-episode-196-the-epicurean-arguments-in-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-06/>

[Quote from Cassius](#)

One additional point on this from the letter to Menoecus: "And therefore a right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality."

Maybe...when we come to label things as either pleasure or pain, and that absence of pain is a pleasure, then it takes away the craving for unlimited pleasurable stimulation?

Post by "Cassius" of October 14, 2023 at 6:57 PM

Thanks for those calculations Pacatus!

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

Question: Can B1 and B2 also have katastematic qualities? For example, chronic physical pain or clinical depression?

You're pursuing this out of interest and you enjoy it (I feel sure), but to me I would think a newer person would find this to be hazardous if they pursue it before more basic issues are resolved. I don't have a cite ready at hand to back this up, but I am pretty sure that the authorities don't consider "duration" (implied in the word chronic) as "the" key defining aspect of katastematic pleasure, but rather "changeability," which is related but I would say is not the same. Don's concern was (I think rightly) "since memories can be a kinetic pleasure." It's pretty clear that some 'actions' like memories can come and go last longer than others, so it isn't the time element alone or maybe even primarily that distinguishes the two. If someone asserts that it is, where is the dividing line between a long-lasting kinetic pleasure and a katastematic one? A minute? An hour? A day? At what point in time is the dividing line crossed and kinetic become katastematic?

In fact, that's the underlying problem of talking about K/K. It isn't really clear what distinguishes one from the other. Does katastematic really equate to "rest?" How is sustained smooth motion over a long period of time different than "rest?" What is "rest" in the first place in a universe with no "bottom" and composed of never-ceasing-to-move atoms flying through space? I know that some people assert answers to these questions, but authoritative cites explaining these things are not easy to find, and certainly not clear explanations in Epicurean texts. By the time a newer person tries long enough to get to the bottom of it I would wager most of them have created for themselves more intellectual pain than pleasure and gone a long way toward

thinking that trying to decode Epicurus is fruitless.

Post by “Pacatus” of October 14, 2023 at 7:16 PM

[Cassius](#)

Yes, I enjoyed some kinetic pleasure at engaging that kind of formulaic logic (despite my discomfort with the notion of "calculus" when it comes to hedonic choice-making 😞).

But I agree with your reservations.

Post by “Cassius” of October 14, 2023 at 8:55 PM

I am reviewing the Boeri / Aioz book (Theory and Practice in Epicurean Political Philosophy) and came across this passage relevant to our discussion of memory, from their Chapter 5:

In sum, friendship is an indispensable condition for happiness and, like justice, is a powerful means for achieving imperturbability. But friendship is also thought of as a sort of kinetic pleasure: the memory of a dead friend appears to Epicurus ‘sweet’ (Plutarch, *Pleasant Life* 1105E; Us. 213); it produces joy and ends by being a relief capable of counteracting the body’s pains.

Post by “Don” of October 15, 2023 at 10:43 AM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

Question: Can B1 and B2 also have katastematic qualities? For example, chronic physical pain or clinical depression?

I would say no. Epicurus identified katastematic and kinetic as categories of pleasure specifically. Pain seems specifically to be divided into those of body and those of mind. Pleasure appears to have a more nuanced division.

Post by “Don” of October 15, 2023 at 11:12 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think the designation of A1 as kinetic and A2 as katastematic would not be helpful. Regardless of different readings of the texts, as I understand the situation the k/k terminology is not nearly as well establishable in the core Epicurus and Lucretius texts as is the discussion of the difference between "stimulation" vs "absence of pain / normal experience of life."

Actually, from my reading of the texts, that is exactly the description of kinetic and katastematic. There seems to be no strict, formal "mental" or "physical" pleasure categorization because all pleasure at heart is "physical" and material. Epicurus identified kinetic and katastematic pleasure to define his broad spectrum of pleasure available to us, rather than the narrow band accepted by the Cyrenaics or later but Cicero.

Pain on the hand can be (broadly) defined adequately as of the mind or of the body.

I also think we need to acknowledge that there is a difference between pain and suffering. Acknowledging and dealing with pain is one thing. Dwelling on, focusing on, wallowing in pain increases suffering, not the pain itself. This, if I remember correctly, is corroborated by psychological research, including the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn. Suffering can be self-inflicted. It doesn't make it any less real, but I think this idea of suffering vs pain is directly related to Epicurus's situation in his dying days.

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 11:56 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I also think we need to acknowledge that there is a difference between pain and suffering

At the moment I would emphasize in order of importance:

(1) There are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, which means the presence of one is the absence of the other. Each and every feeling in life which is agreeable falls under pleasure, each and every feeling that is disagreeable falls under pain.

(2) Within "pleasure" and "pain" there are many different particular feelings which vary greatly from one another in terms of how we experience them. The pleasure of ice cream varies from the pleasure of listening to music. The pleasure of Beethoven differs from the pleasure of Wagner. This point two does not contradict point one, it's just a different perspective level.

(3) From a "whole person" perspective, the limit of the quantity of pleasure is the absence of pain. There is no way to improve the quantity of pleasure past 100%, and this understanding gives us the understanding that pleasure has a limit, and therefore it can't be made "better" by living forever. Living longer gives us more time experiencing pleasure, but no matter how long we live life never gets better than 100% pleasure.

Once propositions one and two are accepted then it's fair game to parse individual pleasures and pains any way one prefers to think about them and label them with whatever words seem useful in any language we'd like to use. But until it is accepted that pleasure includes both stimulating and non-stimulating pleasures, it's not possible to stand up against the argument of Cicero and others that Epicurus is using the term "pleasure" in a non-standard way.

Cicero's complaint is correct - Epicurus *is* using the word "pleasure" in a non-standard way, just like he uses "god" in a non-standard way. It seems clear that Epicurean terminology on pleasure differs from normal usage, and that "pleasure" includes two types of pleasures *which we can understand in words that mean something to us* (1 - exciting / stimulating pleasures vs 2 - pleasures of normal living in which we are not stimulated / excited).

The equation of "pleasure = absence of pain" is never going to make sense to a person who insists on sticking to standard terminology. Whatever explanations get us over that hurdle is desirable, and I am sure there are many ways to do it.

Post by “Don” of October 15, 2023 at 12:15 PM

I would agree with your points with an important caveat for me.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But until it is accepted that pleasure includes both stimulating and non-stimulating pleasures, it's not possible to stand up against the argument of Cicero and others that Epicurus is using the term "pleasure" in a non-standard way.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"pleasure" includes two types of pleasures which we can understand in words that mean something to us (1 - exciting / stimulating pleasures vs 2 - pleasures of normal living in which we are not stimulated / excited).

I can't quite put my finger on it, but "non-stimulating" and "not stimulated" sounds like falling into a Cyrenaic trap. "Non-stimulating" and "not stimulated" sounds like there's no sensation at all. That's not what you want to convey. Those terms sound like a Cyrenaic argument just waiting in that if it's not pleasure, then you're asleep or dead or, if not in pain, in some third neutral state.

Those what you term non-stimulating pleasures are taking pleasure, consciously, in the stable (NOT STATIC) well-functioning of the body and the tranquility of an undisturbed mind. The pleasure of floating on a calm sea and the assurance of its continuance. As mortal humans, we aren't guaranteed this pleasure forever, if it can be achieved, but we can expect moments IF we accept the fact that we have access to this AS pleasure, as a pleasurable feeling. That was Epicurus's genius in pointing this out.

Post by “Don” of October 15, 2023 at 12:21 PM

As an adjacent issue that's come up in this discussion, I wanted to see where "mental pain" came up the texts to see what's being conveyed in the texts and/or being obfuscated by translation. Here's a selection:

PD3

Ὅρος τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος ὑπεξάιρεις. ὅπου δ' ἂν τὸ ἡδόμενον ἐνῆ, καθ' ὃν ἂν χρόνον ἦ, οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἀλγοῦν ἢ τὸ λυπούμενον ἢ τὸ συναμφοτέρον.

άλγος pain (of either mind or body), sorrow, trouble, grief, distress, woe; in Homer, mostly in pl., sufferings

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἄλγος](#)

λυπούμενος from verb λυπεω

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, λυ π-έω](#)

[St-Andre note to PD3] The word ἡδονή is often translated solely as "pleasure"; however, depending on the context I also translate it as "joy", "delight", "enjoyment", or even "happiness" in the modern sense because the Greek word ἡδονή refers to any physical,

emotional, or mental state that is filled with sweetness (ἡδύς), whereas the English word "pleasure" carries stronger connotations of a purely physical state (although compare phrases such as "the pleasures of philosophy"). Furthermore, although there is no hard and fast distinction between ἄλγος as bodily pain and λυπούμενος as mental distress, the former word tends to be used more in relation to the body and the latter more in relation to the mind or emotions; see also Principal Doctrine #10. For other texts that emphasize the concept of a natural limit to enjoyment, see [Principal Doctrines](#) #11, #15, #18, #19, #20, as well as Letter to Menoikos, Section 133, Vatican Saying #35, and Fragment #548.

Letter to Menoikeus 128

τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πάσαν αἴρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν <τῆς ψυχῆς> ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστι τέλος. τούτου γὰρ χάριν πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μήτε ἀλγῶμεν μήτε ταρβῶμεν. ὅταν δ' ἄπαξ τοῦτο περὶ ἡμᾶς γένηται, λύεται πᾶς ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς χειμῶν, οὐκ ἔχοντος τοῦ ζώου βαδίζειν ὡς πρὸς ἐνδέον τι καὶ ζητεῖν ἕτερον ὢ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὸν συμπληρωθήσεται. τότε γὰρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρῆναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν· <ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν>, οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν.

[128] The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection for the health of the body and for the tranquility of the mind, that is for our physical and our mental existence, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For the sake of this, we do everything in order to neither be in bodily or mental pain nor to be in fear or dread; and so, when once this has come into being around us, it sets free all of the calamity, distress, and suffering of the mind, seeing that the living being has no need to go in search of something that is lacking for the good of our mental and physical existence. For it is then that we need pleasure, if we were to be in pain from the pleasure not being present; but if we were to not be in pain, we no longer desire or beg for pleasure. And this is why we say pleasure is the foundation and fulfillment of the blessed life.

Vocabulary

ἀλγῶμεν (first person plural subjunctive) "if we were to feel bodily pain, to suffer hardship, to feel pain of mind"

ταρβῶμεν (first person plural subjunctive) "if we were to be afraid, to dread" (note: related to the opposite of ataraxia)

"they set free all (πᾶς) the calamity, distress, suffering (χειμῶν) of the soul/mind (ψυχῆς),..."

χειμῶν has the connotation of cold and stormy winter weather. This word then takes on the metaphorical sense of calamity, distress, etc. When you read this word, imagine freezing

blizzards, blinding snowfall, and howling wind!

128f. τότε γὰρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρεῖναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν·

τότε "then, at that time"

χρεῖαν (accusative) "need, want, necessity"

"for then we have need of pleasure,"

μὴ παρεῖναι "to not be by, to not be present"

As in 128b. ἀλγῶμεν (first person plural subjunctive) "if we were to feel bodily pain, to suffer hardship, to feel pain of mind"

"Because it is then that we need pleasure, if we were to be in pain from the pleasure not being present..."

128g. <ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν>, οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν.

ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν,

"but if we were to not be in pain,"

οὐκέτι "no more, no longer"

δεόμεθα, here means "desire, beg for, ask for"; shows up in New Testament to convey "implore, pray for, etc."

"we no longer desire/beg for/ask for pleasure (τῆς ἡδονῆς)."

So, it's not that we "don't need" pleasure, it's that we don't desire it or beg for it like we do when it's not present. Why? Because when we are not in pain, we are full of pleasure. There is no need to seek or beg for pleasure when you have a full measure of pleasure.

λέγομεν "we say"

"and that is why we say pleasure is the foundation and fulfillment, the beginning and end (ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος) of the blessed life."

Fragment 2.

ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀταραξία καὶ <ἡ> ἀπονία καταστηματικάι εἰσιν ἡδοναί. ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργεία βλέπονται.

Epicurus: Lack of mental disturbance and lack of bodily pain are static pleasures, whereas revelry and rejoicing are active pleasures involving movement.

Lack of mental disturbance (ie, mental pain) = ataraxia

lack of bodily pain = aponia (note: I'm not enamoured of that translation, but it'll do for now)

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 12:38 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

"Non-stimulating" and "not stimulated" sounds like there's no sensation at all.

I agree that that deduction would be something to be avoided.

[Quote from Don](#)

The pleasure of floating on a calm sea

But this would be only one such pleasure and we'd likely want to avoid "floating" metaphors as well, unless we are ships, because floating is what ships do. I would say "floating" is going to evoke "mindlessness" or "total inaction" unless we are careful to exclude that. And that's where the kinetic language gets blurry, if for example savoring memories is kinetic.

We're humans, and what we're looking for I think is something that conveys "doing anything and everything that humans do when they are not 'excited' but also not in pain." We're looking for a word that describes all normal activities of life where we aren't "excited" but we are still functioning normally. I would think this is what Torquatus is pointing out as the answer to Chrysippus' hand hypothetical. A hand is which not being stimulated or excited or massaged still falls under "a hand in pleasure" so long as the hand is not in some affirmative pain.

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 12:59 PM

I can't really fault Cicero's reading of the "normal" view of pleasure. He's focusing on words like "delight" but especially "agitation," which isn't being used in the "negative" sense of "agitation" but more in the "my washing machine has an agitator that washes the clothes." It's

not really "length of time" that describes the agitation but something else, and I don't think "motion" really captures the issue either. Almost like we are talking about "excited" atomic particles.

On Ends Book Two:

Cicero: To let you know that I do understand, I first declare that by voluptas I mean what he means by [hedone](#). Now though we often search for a Latin word equivalent to a Greek word and conveying the same sense, in this case there was no need to search. No word can possibly be discovered which more exactly represents in Latin the sense of a Greek word than voluptas. All men everywhere who know Latin denote by this word two things, delight existing in the mind and a sweet agreeable agitation in the body. In fact the character in Trabea's play describes delight as excessive pleasure in the mind, just like the character in Caecilius, who gives out that he is delighted with all delights. But there is this distinction, that voluptas is applied also to the mind (an immoral feeling, as the Stoics think, who deign it as an irrational elevation of the mind when it fancies itself in the enjoyment of some great blessing) while laetitia and gaudium are not used in connexion with the body. But according to the usage of all who speak Latin, pleasure consists in feeling that kind of agreeableness which agitates some one of the senses. This agreeableness too you may apply metaphorically if you please to the mind; for we use the phrase to affect agreeably in both cases, and in connexion with it the word agreeable; if only you understand that midway between the man who says I am enriched with such delight that I am unsteadied and the man who cries now at last is my heart on fire, one of whom is transported with delight, while the other is racked by pain, comes this man's speech though this our acquaintance is quite recent, for he is neither in a state of delight nor of torture; and also that between him who is master of exquisite bodily pleasures and him who is tormented by the intensest pains comes he who is removed from both states.

Post by "Don" of October 15, 2023 at 1:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I don't think "motion" really captures the issue either. Almost like we are talking about "excited" atomic particles.

To me, it's action (kinetic) vs stability (katastematic).

There's also the distinction of pleasure coming from outside ourselves and pleasure coming from internal (mental) sources.

This is not the kinetic/katastematic distinction (I've been burned on making that assumption before!), but it's a distinction that gets discussed in Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Philodemus.

I know you're trying to get at the "pleasure when you're not 'doing' something 'pleasurable'" but there has to be a better way than "non-stimulating."

Post by "Don" of October 15, 2023 at 2:06 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I would say "floating" is going to evoke "mindlessness" or "total inaction" unless we are careful to exclude that. And that's where the kinetic language gets blurry, if for example savoring memories is kinetic.

I would lean into the "relaxation" aspect of floating, liked in an inner tube down a river, luxuriating in the sunshine, slow motion, float.

For memory:

Post

[RE: Modern Neuroscience And The Katastematic / Kinetic Debate](#)

There aren't a lot of opportunities, but I decided to try and replace single words with either katastematic or kinetic pleasure.

It should also be remembered that the phrase "kinetic pleasure" isn't *actually* what Epicurus says. What he says is (as literally as I can make it):

"Peace of mind (ataraxia) and freedom from pain (aponia) are condition/state pleasures; joy (khara) and delight (euphrosyne) are seen in relation to (κατὰ) motion (κίνησις) by means of activity (ἐνεργεία)."

ἢ μὲν...



Don

July 2, 2023 at 11:04 PM

...so that in old age you can be youthful by taking *joy* (*explicitly a kinetic pleasure per Epicurus*) in the good things you remember (letter to Menoikeus)

τῷ μὲν ὅπως γηράσκων νεάζη τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς διὰ τὴν χάριν τῶν γεγονότων

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 2:56 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

This is not the kinetic/katastematic distinction (I've been burned on making that assumption before!), but it's a distinction that gets discussed in Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Philodemus.

I know you're trying to get at the "pleasure when you're not 'doing' something 'pleasurable'" but there has to be a better way than "non-stimulating."

I am not sure exactly what the 'this' refers to there and that is part of the need for greater clarity.

The distinction that is super-critical is the issue that pleasure includes both (1) pleasures that we consider exciting from the norm of life, and (2) the norm of life which is not exciting, but which needs to be considered as pleasure whenever this "norm" is not receiving some painful input.

The real point is that every moment and every aspect of being alive is to be considered "pleasure" unless that moment or aspect involves receiving pleasure.

THAT's the distinction and the two elements on which everything else stands. The default experience of life is "pleasure" in every moment and aspect unless some particular pain is intruding.

Do you consider that distinction the K/K distinction?

Because it is exactly this attitude here that is the problem: I know you're trying to get at the "pleasure when you're not 'doing' something 'pleasurable'" but there has to be a better way than "non-stimulating."

This wording accepts the requirement that pleasure requires excitement. The only requirement for labeling some moment of life "pleasure" is that is not "painful."

There are no other labeling options for something you are conscious and aware of other than "pleasure" or "pain."

Are we agreed on that last sentence?

On Ends Book One, 38 : *Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain.*

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 3:02 PM

[Joshua](#) -- On today's recording session you quoted sections from Lucretius and [Philebus](#).

Do you have those in convenient form where you can paste them here, or at least the line citations?

thanks!

Post by “Joshua” of October 15, 2023 at 3:06 PM

Quote

For often

our body is ill—we see that clearly—

yet we feel pleasure in some other part 150

hidden within. Often the reverse takes place,

as well, when, by contrast, a man whose mind

is sad feel pleasure in his whole body.

In the same way, if a man’s foot pains him, [110]

perhaps at the same time his head may feel

no pain at all.

-Lucretius Book III, tr. Ian Johnstone

Display More

Quote

SOCRATES: Then let us begin with the goddess herself, of whom [Philebus](#) says that she is called Aphrodite, but that her real name is Pleasure.

PROTARCHUS: Very good.

SOCRATES: The awe which I always feel, Protarchus, about the names of the gods is more than human—it exceeds all other fears. And now I would not sin against Aphrodite by naming her amiss; let her be called what she pleases. But Pleasure I know to be manifold, and with her, as I was just now saying, we must begin, and consider what her nature is. She has one name, and therefore you would imagine that she is one; and yet surely she takes the most varied and even unlike forms. For do we not say that the intemperate has pleasure, and that the temperate has pleasure in his very temperance,—that the fool is pleased when he is full of foolish fancies and hopes, and that the wise man has pleasure in his wisdom? and how foolish would any one be who affirmed that all these opposite pleasures are severally alike!

PROTARCHUS: Why, Socrates, they are opposed in so far as they spring from opposite sources, but they are not in themselves opposite. For must not pleasure be of all things most absolutely like pleasure,—that is, like itself?

SOCRATES: Yes, my good friend, just as colour is like colour;—in so far as colours are colours, there is no difference between them; and yet we all know that black is not only unlike, but even absolutely opposed to white: or again, as figure is like figure, for all figures are comprehended under one class; and yet particular figures may be absolutely opposed to one another, and there is an infinite diversity of them. And we might find similar examples in many other things; therefore do not rely upon this argument, which would go to prove the unity of the most extreme opposites. And I suspect that we shall find a similar opposition among pleasures.

PROTARCHUS: Very likely; but how will this invalidate the argument?

SOCRATES: Why, I shall reply, that dissimilar as they are, you apply to them a new predicate, for you say that all pleasant things are good; now although no one can argue that pleasure is not pleasure, he may argue, as we are doing, that pleasures are oftener bad than good; but you call them all good, and at the same time are compelled,

if you are pressed, to acknowledge that they are unlike. And so you must tell us what is the identical quality existing alike in good and bad pleasures, which makes you designate all of them as good.

PROTARCHUS: What do you mean, Socrates? Do you think that any one who asserts pleasure to be the good, will tolerate the notion that some pleasures are good and others bad?

SOCRATES: And yet you will acknowledge that they are different from one another, and sometimes opposed?

PROTARCHUS: Not in so far as they are pleasures.

-Plato, [Philebus](#)

[Display More](#)

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 3:08 PM

Thanks Joshua. Here is Bailey same area Line 98 of Book 3:

Quote

Thus often the body, which is clear to see, is sick, when, all the same we feel pleasure in some other hidden part; and contrariwise it happens that the reverse often comes to be in turn, when one wretched in mind feels pleasure in all his body; in no other wise than if, when a sick man's foot is painful, all the while, may be, his head is in no pain. Moreover, when the limbs are given up to soft sleep, and the heavy body lies slack and senseless, yet there is something else in us, which at that very time is stirred in many ways, and admits within itself all the motions of joy and baseless cares of heart.

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 3:10 PM

For some reason this strikes me as relevant the conversation with Don on exciting vs non-exciting pleasures. Maybe "stir" is another word to add to the pot:

"The mind alone by itself has understanding for itself and rejoices for itself, when no single thing stirs either soul or body."

And the point Socrates is rejecting is exactly what Epicurus is doing in understanding that pleasure has many forms, all of them pleasurable:

But Pleasure I know to be manifold, and with her, as I was just now saying, we must begin, and consider what her nature is. She has one name, and therefore you would imagine that she is one; and yet surely she takes the most varied and even unlike forms. For do we not say that the intemperate has pleasure, and that the temperate has pleasure in his very temperance,—that the fool is pleased when he is full of foolish fancies and hopes, and that the wise man has pleasure in his wisdom? and how foolish would any one be who affirmed that all these opposite pleasures are severally alike!

As we speculated in the podcast, is it possible that the "variation" references in Epicurus are pointing here to Socrates, and affirming that we need to understand that the "types of pleasure" in which pleasure comes includes not only many specific parts of the body and mind but also "exciting" and "normal/non-exciting"? Everybody understands that the pleasure of ice cream is different from listening to music, but they don't understand that pleasure includes both "exciting" pleasures and "all normal non-painful experiences of life."

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 3:21 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Everybody understands that the pleasure of ice cream is different from listening to music, but they don't understand that pleasure includes both "exciting" pleasures and "all normal non-painful experiences of life."

In fact, I am not really sure that all of us here in this thread are agreed on this point. Does anyone not agree that Epicurus is including "all normal non-painful experiences of life" within "pleasure?"

If someone doesn't agree with this (now or even referring to future people who read this thread) we ought to get to the bottom of that.

While we could say "all normal non-painful feelings" instead of "all normal non-painful experiences of life," I would say that wider terminology is important because many are going to say that often they don't feel anything at all, and they are not referring to just when they are unconscious or asleep, they are trying to assert a "neutral" state. As I see it, it is the existence of a neutral state (that of non-feeling, or that of exactly balancing pleasure and pain to get "zero") that is the state being denied by Epicurus. I would say there is no "feeling" labelled "zero" nor is this likely to be a perfectly-matched "zero" sum of pleasures and pains. The latter might be possible, but still that would not be a third alternative beyond pleasure and pain.

Post by "Cassius" of October 15, 2023 at 4:27 PM

More as to wording:

Here's Reid's translation of Cicero in Section III:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Cicero: 'Nay, said I, 'either Epicurus is ignorant or else all human beings who are to be found anywhere are ignorant what pleasure is.'

Torquatus: 'How so?'

Cicero: "Because all pronounce that thing to be pleasure, by the reception of which sense is excited and is pervaded by a certain agreeable feeling.'

Rackham translates that in Loeb as -

"Because the universal opinion is that pleasure is a sensation actively stimulating the percipient sense and diffusing over it a certain agreeable feeling."

Let me get the Latin --

"Quia voluptatem hanc esse sentiunt omnes quam sensus accipiens movetur et iucunditate quadam perfunditur."

voluptas, voluptatis F pleasure, delight, enjoyment

sentio, sentire, sensi, sensus perceive, feel, experience; think, realize, see, understand

accipio, accipere, accepi, acceptustake, grasp, receive, accept, undertake; admit, let in, hear, learn; obey

moveo, movere, movi, motusmove, stir, agitate, affect, provoke, disturb

iucunditate quadam perfunditur.

jucunditas, jucunditatis F charm, agreeableness, pleasing quality; pleasantness/amiability; favors

quidam, quaedam, quoddama certain thing

perfuno, perfundere, perfudi, perfususpour over/through, wet, flood, bathe; overspread, coat, overlay; imbue

Post by "Cassius" of October 15, 2023 at 4:44 PM

Also just a little further down, once again we have a form of "moveo," this time with 'hilarity'



"Everyone uses the Greek word hedone and the Latin voluptas to mean an agreeable and exhilarating stimulation of the sense."

Omnes enim iucundum motum quo sensus hilaretur Graece hedone Latine voluptatem vocant."

Omnes enim iucundum motum quo sensus hilaretur Graece hedone Latine voluptatem

jucundus, jucunda -um, jucundior -or -us, jucundissimus -a -um
pleasant/agreeable/delightful/pleasing; congenial

moveo, movere, movi, motus move, stir, agitate, affect, provoke, disturb

sentio, sentire, sensi, sensus perceive, feel, experience; think, realize, see, understand

hilaro, hilarare, hilaravi, hilaratus cheer, gladden; give cheerful appearance to

graecus, graeca, graecum Greek

hedus, hedi Mkid, young goat; two stars in constellation Auriga,"The Kid"

fero, ferre, tuli, latus bring, bear; tell/speak of; consider; carry off, win, receive, produce; get

voluptas, voluptatis F pleasure, delight, enjoyment

vocant.

voco, vocare, vocavi, vocatuscall, summon; name; call upon

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 4:56 PM

I think analogies would help.

My first suggestion is an EKG, with the normal heartbeat (which is in motion) beating in a regular pattern. The two types of pleasure included by Epicurus under the word "pleasure" would be (1) the normal regular heartbeat (pictured) and also (2) an agreeable (pleasurable) stimulation in which the heartbeat is faster/stronger but still regular.

A disagreeable (painful) stimulation would be irregular or misshapen patterns.

... since it is normal:



Cicero would assert that picture does not illustrate pleasure, and that it would not illustrate pleasure unless the pattern deviated to be faster/stronger than normal.

I presume that a seismograph or an oscilloscope could be used for similar analogies. As long as life goes "humming along" normally we are in pleasure, but when the sound gets distorted for any reason, that is pain.

Post by “Don” of October 15, 2023 at 5:10 PM

FYI

Ἠδονή hēdonē

Woodhouse, S. C. (1910) English-Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language[1], London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited.

allurement idem, page 25.

amusement idem, page 28.

caprice idem, page 112.

cheer idem, page 128.

complacency idem, page 151.

dalliance idem, page 193.

delectation idem, page 207.

delight idem, page 208.

ecstasy idem, page 261.

elation idem, page 265.

enchantment idem, page 270.

enjoyment idem, page 275.

entrancement idem, page 278.

exhilaration idem, page 291.

fascination idem, page 308.

gaiety idem, page 351.

gladness idem, page 361.

glee idem, page 361.

gratification idem, page 370.

hilarity idem, page 400.

idiosyncrasy idem, page 413.

intoxication idem, page 454.

jollity idem, page 464.

joy idem, page 464.

light-heartedness idem, page 491.

merriment idem, page 526.

mirth idem, page 532.

pleasure idem, page 620.

rapture idem, page 672.

ravishment idem, page 674.

rejoicing idem, page 689.

satisfaction idem, page 734.

transport idem, page 889.

treat idem, page 892.

zest idem, page 997.

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 6:03 PM

One more example, this time Torquatus using his own words in Book 1 line 56.

Rackham's "active sensation" does not seem as literal as Reid's "stirs the senses" - the operative word is again "moveat."

Non placet autem detracta voluptate aegritudinem statim consequi, nisi in voluptatis locum dolor forte successerit; at contra gaudere nosmet omittendis doloribus, etiamsi voluptas ea quae sensum moveat nulla successerit; eoque intellegi potest quanta voluptas sit non dolore.

Rackham:

But we do not agree that when pleasure is withdrawn uneasiness at once ensues, unless the pleasure happens to have been replaced by a pain; while on the other hand one is glad to lose a pain even though no active sensation of pleasure comes in its place: a fact that serves to show how great a pleasure is the mere absence of pain.

Reid:

We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the

contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain.

Post by “Don” of October 15, 2023 at 6:11 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe "stir" is another word to add to the pot:

Pun intended, I hope 😊

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Does anyone not agree that Epicurus is including "all normal non-painful experiences of life" within "pleasure?"

Fully agree!! The experience of life itself, when running smoothly "in the background," is pleasure, too.

That said, words like "normal" to refer to this state still rub me the wrong way, as if "exciting" pleasure is "abnormal."

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I would say there is no "feeling" labelled "zero" nor is this likely to be a perfectly-matched "zero" sum of pleasures and pains. The latter might be possible, but still that would not be a third alternative beyond pleasure and pain.

This is the position of psychological research. There is no zero state. If you're zero, you're dead.

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 6:14 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

That said, words like "normal" to refer to this state still rub me the wrong way, as if "exciting" pleasure is "abnormal."

Very good point! Normal might be one of the descriptive words that helps, but it isn't sufficient standing alone. "Natural" or similar is probably better. The names for both categories of pleasure need positive descriptors without associated negative baggage.

Post by “Kalosyni” of October 15, 2023 at 6:14 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Everybody understands that the pleasure of ice cream is different from listening to music, but they don't understand that pleasure includes both "exciting" pleasures and "all normal non-painful experiences of life."

The pleasure that comes from ice cream is different because the part of the body involved, and perhaps the jolt of sugar has a greater intensity...but perhaps doesn't last as long as the pleasure of music (enjoyable to the ears and perhaps tied to happy memories). Yet, another thing to think about is that the underlying "state of being pleased" is actually the same for both of these, therefore you could substitute one for the other (if necessary).

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 6:18 PM

Ironically enough "disturbance" is probably useful, but it can't be used in way that implies that the natural condition is immobile or unmoving or that any deviation from day-to-day smoothness is bad.

This sort of evokes the issue of whether Epicurus would agree that pleasure can be seen as "smooth motion" as I think Diogenes Laertius says of Aristippus. I am tempted to say that he would agree on that point, and that deviation from "smoothness" like on the oscilloscope or the EKG is the key attribute of pain. I believe we could enlist Lucretius to support that point.

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2023 at 6:20 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3417-episode-196-the-epicurean-arguments-in-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-06/>

I see I have collected the 'smooth motion' references here:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Diogenes Laertius Book II Aristippus

"He laid down as the end the smooth motion resulting in sensation."

Post

[RE: Epicurus And Pleasure As The Awareness Of Smooth Motion](#)

Text references to smooth motion or smoothness:

Diogenes Laertius [Book II Aristippus](#)

"He laid down as the end the smooth motion resulting in sensation."

Lucretius Book Two (Bailey):

[398] There is this too that the liquids of honey and milk give a pleasant sensation of the tongue, when rolled in the mouth; but on the other hand, the loathsome nature of wormwood and biting centaury set the mouth awry by their noisome taste; so that you may easily know that those things which can touch the senses...



Cassius

May 10, 2023 at 9:36 AM

Post by "Don" of October 15, 2023 at 8:42 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I am not sure exactly what the 'this' refers to there

[Quote from Don](#)

pleasure coming from outside ourselves and pleasure coming from internal (mental) sources...

... does not equate one to one to kinetic and katastematic.

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 8:13 AM

Episode 196 of Lucretius Today is Now Available! We continue to cover fascinating material that is highly relevant to our conversations, so again I wanted to get this out as quickly as possible.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57252258>

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 9:12 AM

As we discuss words like "normal" or "regular" to describe the pleasure of daily life even in the absence of stimulation, I think we should remember DeWitt's focus on "health" as a description of the normal regular non-painful condition (page numbers refer to DeWitt's "Epicurus and his philosophy")

VS54. We must not pretend to study philosophy, but study it in reality, for it is not the appearance of health that we need, but real health.

I am not sure where this comes from in Horace, but on p 29 of the book: "For this ambitious program of expansion the school was prepared as any Greek school had ever been or ever would be. Not only was every convert obligated to become a missionary; he was also a colporteur who had available a pamphlet for every need. "Are you bloated with love of praise? There are infallible rites," wrote Horace, "which can restore your health if only you will read a pamphlet three times with open mind."

Also page 66: "Neither was he in debt to his teachers for his hedonism. None of them was a hedonist. He was in debt to Plato for suggestions concerning the classification of desires and the calculus of advantage in pleasure, but differed from both Plato and Aristippus in his definition of pleasure. To neither of these was continuous pleasure conceivable, because they recognized only peaks of pleasure separated either by intervals void of pleasure or by neutral states. In order to escape from these logical dead ends Epicurus worked his way to a novel

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3417-episode-196-the-epicurean-arguments-in-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-06/>

division of pleasures into those that were basic and those that were decorative. The pleasure of being sane and in health is basic and can be enjoyed continually. All other pleasures are superfluous and decorative. For this doctrine, once more, he was in debt to no teacher.

- Letter to Menoecus: 122] "Let no one when young delay to study philosophy, nor when he is old grow weary of his study. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of his soul."

- page 148 in regard to time - "The line of reasoning may be sketched as follows: a human being is susceptible of sickness but sickness is not a permanent attribute. only a temporary condition, that is, an accident. Sickness in its turn may be long or short. but this quality of length or brevity is not a permanent attribute but an accident. Therefore it is an accident of an accident. Next, by analogy, since we associate time with states of health or sickness. the time of their duration is said to be long or short. Thus long and short become predicates of time while in reality they apply only to states of health or sickness. This amounts to saying that in the phrases "a long time" or "a short time" the adjectives are transferred epithets.

page 217 - He also had something new to say on the true relation of pleasure to pain. Some had believed them true opposites on the ground of universal pursuit and universal avoidance. Others had firmly denied this on the ground that some pleasures were good and some bad, while some denied that any pleasures were good. Neither were either laymen or philosophers agreed upon the nature of pain; Antisthenes and the Spartans classified it as good. Epicurus discovered a logical position for himself by positing an indissoluble connection between pleasure and health and between pain and disease. No one could then with

reason deny that pleasure was a true opposite to pain since it would mean denying that health was a true opposite to disease. Neither could men deny that health was a good and disease an evil. By the same token pleasure was bound to be a good and pain an evil.

page 223 - It follows from this that pleasure is not to be opposed to pain on the ground alone that all creatures pursue the one and avoid the other: the two are true opposites because they stand in the same relation as health which preserves and disease which destroys. It is for this reason that the one is good and the other is evil, Vatican Saying 37: "Human nature is vulnerable to evil, not to the good. because it is preserved by pleasures, destroyed by pains." This may be taken to mean that pleasure, as it were, is nutriment to the human being, as food is, and that human nature reaches out for it just as each living thing by some natural impulse seeks its appropriate food. It is no accident that the following statement of Aristotle is to be found in his discussion of pleasure: "And it may well be that in the lower animals there is some natural good, superior to their scale of existence, which reaches out for the kindred good." With this surmise Epicurus would have concurred: all creatures

seek pleasure as if food; they avoid pain as if poison.

Post by “Don” of October 16, 2023 at 1:04 PM

I return to this section of Diogenes Laertius (10.136) over and over again when this topic comes up:

(Quote)

[136] He (Epicurus) differs from the Cyrenaics with regard to pleasure (περὶ τῆς ἡδονῆς). They do not include under the term the pleasure which is a state of rest (τὴν καταστηματικὴν - tes katastematiken), but only that which consists in motion (ἐν κινήσει - en kinesei). **Epicurus admits both (i.e., katastematiken and en kinesei); also** pleasure of mind as well as of body (ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος),

as he (Epicurus) states:

1. in his work *On Choice and Avoidance*
2. **and** in that *On the Ethical End*
3. **and** in the first book of his work *On Human Life*
4. and in the epistle to his philosopher friends in Mytilene
5. So also Diogenes [of Tarsus] in the seventeenth book of his *Epilecta*
6. and Metrodorus in his *Timocrates*, whose actual words are : "Thus pleasure being conceived both as that species which consists in motion (τε κατὰ κίνησιν (kinesin)) and that which is a state of rest (καταστηματικῆς (katastematikes))."
 1. "νοουμένης δὲ ἡδονῆς τῆς τε κατὰ κίνησιν (kinesin) καὶ τῆς καταστηματικῆς (katastematikes)."

The words of Epicurus in his work *On Choice (and Avoidance)* are: "Peace of mind (ἀταραξία - ataraxia) and freedom from pain (ἀπονία - aponia) are pleasures which imply a state of rest (καταστηματικάι - katastematikai); joy (χαρὰ khara) and delight (εὐφροσύνη euphrosyne) are seen to consist in motion and activity (κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργεία - kata kinesin energeia)."

(End of Quote)

Considering "rest " vs "motion" might be fruitful somehow. I know I'm sneaking in kinetic and katastematic again, but evidently, per Diogenes, Epicurus talked about this distinction in at least four different works. And hammered home that it was a primary difference between his philosophy and the Cyrenaics.

I'd really like to get away from words like basic, normal, non-stimulating, etc. Cassius's bringing up "health" above is a good path, too.

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 1:44 PM

It's the connotations of the words that cause us all the problems. "Rest" implies sitting around doing nothing. "Motion" implies physical movement, even though savoring memories, or anything that implies change, is also within the idea of motion. And while "kinetic" is going to evoke frenzy in English-speaking minds, "katastematic" is never going to evoke anything but "woo" or being "comatose" at best.

I can see why it is tempting to define things in the negative so as to give maximum latitude to the expression that anything done during the normal healthy state - whether it involves motion, rest, or whatever, that is not painful is pleasurable.

I want to point something else out that Joshua raised in the podcast that I think is extremely important. Joshua pointed out not one but two sections (if I recall correctly, in regard to (1) pleasure being one name that describes many pleasurable feelings, and (2) the meaning of "variety") where Cicero's analysis of pleasure seems to be tracking very closely to Plato's [Philebus](#) analysis.

I think we need to hold open the strong possibility that not only Torquatus/Cicero, but also Epicurus himself, were intentionally tracking Plato's anti-pleasure analysis.

And that's going to lead us back to the issue of "the limit of pleasure," which was raised as a huge issue in [Philebus](#). I think we are going to find that the term "limit of pleasure" has a very precise reason for being such a central part of the analysis. As part of that, I think we will find that the "limit of pleasure" or "height of pleasure" is not a "DESTINATION" at all, but the "best" ongoing way of conducting the journey of life.

We have been raising but not satisfactorily answering (in my view, at least not fully) the question of why - if on a particular day we should reach 100% pleasure) we should want to live any longer. That's like asking why, if we climb to the top of Mount Everest, we should want to continue to live at all. No one but a Stoic or other warped personality would conclude that meeting a goal like that "once" is "good enough for a lifetime."

I think we're going to conclude that just like the predominance of pains over pleasures describes Epicurus' last day, defining the "limit of pleasure" as containing both "stimulative" forms and "non-stimulative" forms allows us to describe "the best life." But "the best life" is not a destination, but a journey, and just as pleasure was desirable all the way along, more pleasure so long as we can live another day it is also desirable.

The consolation involved in having a "limit of pleasure" is that it gives us a day to day goal to strive for, and it tells us that this is the "best we can do" just like we keep our cars tuned and cleaned so that they run at tip-top performance. The purpose of getting cars in tip-top condition is not so they can sit still and be looked at, but so that they can perform as cars are able to do at the top of their game.

So I think if we continue to compare our Epicurean texts to [Philebus](#), as Joshua is doing, we're going to see that it is a mistake to think of the "end" or "goal" of life as a single destination at which we can arrive and then be satisfied and think to ourselves that "it's time to die."

Quote from Letter to Menoecus

And he who counsels the young man to live well, but the old man to make a good end, is foolish, not merely because of the desirability of life, but also because it is the same training which teaches to live well and to die well. Yet much worse still is the man who says it is good not to be born but *'once born make haste to pass the gates of Death'*.

Post by "Cassius" of October 16, 2023 at 3:05 PM

[Quote from Diogenes Laertius](#)

[136] Epicurus differs from the Cyrenaics about pleasure. For they do not admit static pleasure, but only that which consists in motion. But Epicurus admits both kinds both in the soul and in the body, as he says in the work on Choice and Avoidance and in the book on The Ends of Life and in the first book On Lives and in the letter to his friends in Mytilene. Similarly, Diogenes in the 17th book of Miscellanies and Metrodorus in the Timocrates speak thus: 'Pleasure can be thought of both as consisting in motion and as static.' And Epicurus in the work on Choice speaks as follows: 'Freedom from trouble in the mind and from pain in the body are static pleasures, but Joy and exultation are considered as active pleasures involving motion. '

When your mind is not being excited, but is operating at its normal speed and doing its normal things, is that something that can be well conveyed in English using the word "static"?

When your body is not being stimulated through massage or in any other ways that moves the senses from their standard state of good health and operation, can that condition be conveyed using the word "static"?

Even more so, an untranslated Greek word does not convey what is sought to be conveyed. To be clear, the untranslated word has to immediately be explained, or else you are left with an impasse with the Ciceros of the world, and the normal reasonable man is going to agree with Cicero. Just as Cicero said, this is not a dark subject where use of technical language can be excused. This calls for clarity, and I feel sure that Epicurus gave the explanation with clarity, and that our problem arises because the clear and detailed explanation did not survive, not that he or his later heads of the school refused to give one.

To be fair, part of the problem may be that it **does** survive but we do not see it due to translation issues and our own prejudices. Statements like [PD08](#) that no pleasure is a bad thing in itself may be intended to show in the negative that all pleasure is desirable, and that we are to treat these statements as logical axioms which allow of no exceptions and have to be carried to their logical extremes.

So whether we are talking about "defining katastematic" or just being clear in the first place, the challenge is the same - we need to convey what is being discussed in plain English. Healthy operation of body and healthy operation of mind are not **that** hard to designate clearly, and we need to find better ways to do so.

It isn't a full explanation to say "Absence of pain is pleasure, and that the greatest pleasure" which is basically all Cicero allows Torquatus to do in answer to Cicero's questioning.

I will admit that I am getting the idea that there is a deeper mystery here. How did it ever get to the point in 50BC that Cicero could make a colorable argument that the relationship between pleasure and absence of pain was not being explained satisfactorily even by the Epicureans themselves? It's almost as if (A) the Emperor Julian in celebrating the disappearance of the texts, and (B) Cicero saying that no one but Epicureans read the Epicurean texts (I think that was Cicero, wasn't it?), and (C) Cicero warning Torquatus not to argue that the Epicureans didn't enjoy literature, because Epicurus never argued that, and (D) Philodemus complaining about people who were oversimplifying ---- are all pointing us toward a problem that was developing in the decades between Epicurus and Cicero.

How could it get to the point where Cicero could make this argument that Epicurus was unclear and hope to be taken seriously? Was our problem of lack of transmission of texts already beginning then?

I think that's something else we need to explore.

Post by "TauPhi" of October 16, 2023 at 4:19 PM

First of all, #196 is really, really good. Well done [Cassius](#), [Joshua](#) and [Kalosyni](#). I smiled to myself several times during the podcast. The pleasure issues you're discussing and the points you're making are top-notch.

I want to make a comment about these two excellent questions:

Quote from [Cassius](#)

When your mind is not being excited, but is operating at its normal speed and doing its normal things, is that something that can be well conveyed in English using the word "static"?

When your body is not being stimulated through massage or in any other ways that moves the senses from their standard state of good health and operation, can that condition be conveyed using the word word "static"?

"Normal speed of mind operation" and "standard state of good health and operation of the senses" seem to me as very good descriptive attempts at the act of living. And this is close to my understanding of katastematic pleasure. Here's the idea: The moment any life comes into existence is the moment katastematic pleasure arrives as well. Any being capable of experiencing pleasure has no choice but to experience katastematic pleasure. It's like air. It is air, in fact. It's a steady release of dopamine. It is the act of feeling. The act of living. It's with us always and it's only disrupted by pain. The pain in many shapes and forms. The fear of gods, death and spiders; kinetic pleasures going wrong; the pain of degrading body, weakening senses, loss of mind's sharpness. The pain is usually with us to some degree but katastematic pleasure is almost always stronger than our pain. That's the reason we choose to keep living. Also, we almost unanimously don't realise what we are equipped with since day one and, like Cicero, we are surprised that there isn't a third, neutral state between pleasure and pain.

Oh, and I forgot to answer the questions. I'd say: No. 'Static' doesn't appear to be sufficient in this situation.

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 4:23 PM

It is *maddening* that the [Principal Doctrines](#) do not include in their top statements - or at all! - the simple positive statement that "pleasure is desirable."

I am sure there are more, but I can see two main possible explanations for this:

(1) Epicurus was treating his letter to Menoeceus, or some other document where he does say this, as a preliminary statement even more fundamental than the list contained in the [Principal Doctrines](#).

(2) Epicurus was being "in your face" again (like "*the sun it is the size it appears to be*") and taking a rigorously logical position that it is not necessary to say what is not necessary to say. This *might* be what Torquatus is alluding to at line 30 of On Ends Book One:

[30] Every creature, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and delights therein as in its supreme good, while it recoils from pain as its supreme evil, and banishes that, so far as it can, from its own presence, and this it does while still uncorrupted, and while nature herself prompts unbiased and unaffected decisions. So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak; the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts.

Given our recent discussions, anyone want to suggest other possibilities?

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 4:26 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

First of all, #196 is really, really good. Well done Cassius, Joshua and Kalosyni. I smiled to myself several times during the podcast. The pleasure issues you're discussing and the points you're making are top-notch.

Thank you TauPhi. I have to apologize to Martin. He was there too, but he joined late and I was so wrapped up in the conversation that I did not notice so I did not call on him at the end.

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 4:34 PM

I need to dig into the full chapter that Gosling and Taylor devote to the K/K issue, but here is [Nikolsky](#) speaking in a way I think all of us are in agreement with:

Thus, the Epicurean view of the physical nature of pleasure as a whole varies little from that of other philosophers: in Epicurus' opinion, pleasure is experienced when the atoms of a human body, acted upon by a certain force, find themselves in their proper places, i.e., when the organism attains its natural state under the effect of some influence. Epicurus, however, differed from his predecessors on one essential point. When speaking about pleasure as restoration, Plato and his followers meant by this only the process of restoration, separating this process from its result and believing that it leads to a neutral state, a state of rest, when both pleasure and pain are absent. Proceeding from this, they proved that pleasure cannot be the actual good and end: from their point of view, it is a process of becoming leading to another end different from it – the absence of pain. For example, when we satisfy hunger, the end is not pleasure but the state of satiety regarded by the Academics as neutral.²⁴ By contrast, I propose, and aiming to refute this argument, Epicurus links pleasure not only with the process but also with the result of restoration, i.e., with the natural state which the organism attains. In connection with this new interpretation of pleasure Epicurus introduces his own term *κατάστημα*; unlike the Academy's term *κατάστασις*, cognate with it, it denoted the result and not the process of restoration. If we take into account all those associations with the traditional description of pleasure which the root verb *καθίστημι* carried, and also if we do not ignore the description of the nature of

²⁴ See, for example, Plato *Philebus* 54a ff.

pleasure in the passage from Lucretius cited above, there is hardly any reason to believe that Epicurus denoted by this term a perfectly neutral state, a state where both pain and positive pleasure are absent. It would be more reasonable to assume that, when speaking about 'the good state of the body' (εὐσταθὲς κατάστημα), Epicurus meant such a state which is necessarily the effect of some external force restoring or supporting the organism.²⁵ Such an interpretation of the given concept appears to be corroborated by a number of other facts as well.

Among the *Vatican Sayings* there is one saying by Epicurus in which 'the good state of the body' is explained by three examples – 'not to be hungry, thirsty, or cold.'²⁶ One may get the impression that what this implies is simply the absence of pain, i.e., a neutral state. However, if we take a closer look at how Epicurus explains cases of a similar kind, it will appear that he views this state in an entirely different way. As for the first two states that are mentioned here, 'not to be hungry' and 'not to be thirsty,' they are inseparable from the process of satisfying hunger and thirst and from the external influence on the organism thanks to which man satisfies these desires, i.e., from eating and drinking. For example, in his *Letter to Menoeceus*²⁷ Epicurus states that even bread and water can confer the highest possible pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips. Obviously, Epicurus means by this the state of satiety, but he does not in any way separate it from pleasure from eating and drinking that leads to this state. Apparently, the Epicureans similarly interpreted the meaning of their statement, known to us from Plutarch²⁸ and Athenaeus,²⁹ that the beginning and root of every good is a pleasure of the stomach. Again,

Post by "Cassius" of October 16, 2023 at 4:48 PM

While I think Gosling & Taylor are the gold standard on this question, they have a habit of writing in ways that require care. For example it appears that they write a long paragraph about views with which they disagree and expect the reader to understand that they disagree solely because they start the paragraph off with "Notoriously."

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

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

After a page they do get around to describing the kind of view that they "oppose," and their position becomes more clear because they have described the "notorious" view as "awkward," and in the end they become much more clear. But it takes dedicated reading to pull out their conclusion.

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

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

19.0.4. The kind of view we wish to oppose holds that it was an important feature of Epicureanism to insist on dividing pleasures into two sorts, sensory ones on the one hand, and katastematic ones, of which lack of disturbance of mind (*ataraxia*) and lack of pain (*aponia*) are the important examples, on the other. The distinction was important to Epicurus because it was the latter which he wished to put forward as the good in life, and he needed the contrast in order to defend himself against the charge that he was advocating a life of debauchery. He can be seen doing this in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (DL X.131-2) where he says that when we call pleasure the goal we do not mean the pleasures of profligates, but to be without pain of body or distress of mind. The pleasures of profligates are obviously the sensory pleasures, and Epicurus is making it clear that he is putting forward something else as our goal. There are four objections which such views have to meet (see 19.0.6-9).

19.0.6. As we have pointed out, all these views assume that the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasures was one on which Epicurus put a particular emphasis, and that they were different kinds of pleasure, the good in life consisting in some of the latter. It is this feature of all such views which creates the problems. These are as follows:

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

368

Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures

19.0.6

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

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

374

Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures

19.3.2

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

Post by "Godfrey" of October 16, 2023 at 4:53 PM

Could [VS11](#) possibly have any relevance in this discussion? If it does, it's certainly not explicit. It's set up as contrasting to something, but the question is what it's contrasting to. I've typically thought of it in terms of discussing people's actions, but what if it's about k/k pleasures. Admittedly, I'm probably reaching pretty far....

[VS11](#): For most people, to be quiet is to be numb and to be active is to be frenzied.

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 4:59 PM

386 Katastematic and Kinetic Pleasures 19.4.20

19.4.20. In his *Non Posse* Plutarch is arguing against the Epicureans to the effect that a life of constant bodily pleasure and tranquillity of mind is impossible. The sometimes sensible criticisms need not delay us. What is important for present purposes is the total lack of any sign that Plutarch saw in his Epicurean texts any stress on an important distinction between katastematic and kinetic pleasures. To begin with *ataraxia* and *chara* (joy) are treated as two names for the same thing, and they are geared simply to the body's pleasures, with no hint that this is some non-sensory absence of pain:

'they (the Epicureans) do well indeed,' said Theon, 'and take the way of nature [in passing from the pleasures of the body to the soul] if in their pursuit there they find something better and really more perfect as do men in academic or public life. But if you listen to them shouting in protest that the soul is only constituted to take joy and be calm with regard to present and expected pleasures of the body, and that this is its good, don't you think that they are using the soul as a decanter for the body . . . ?' (*Non Posse* 1088e)

I am just not familiar enough well relate to the name Theon

Last excerpt: As I read it, this is as close as Gosling & Taylor get to a clear conclusion:

pleasure is kinetic. This is acknowledged by Rist ((2), p. 102) when he says that the experience of *katastematic* pleasure consists in gentle motions of atoms, so that the difference between the two pleasures comes down to a difference between the steadiness and endurance of the motions. The more one stresses this the less important the distinction comes to look, since any condition, however steady, of a living thing, must according to Epicurus, be a condition of perceiving: but there is no evidence of a special kind of perceiving or object of perception to constitute *ataraxia* and *aponia*. Consequently we should be left with steady long-lasting perceptions over against fleeting ones. It seems simplest just to suppose that when the organism is functioning harmoniously it is always having some form of perception; that since the operation is harmonious the perception is pleasant and without pain; and that is just what *aponia* is. *Ataraxia* is the condition when, because of correct views, our expectations are undisturbed by fear, our desires do not pursue empty objectives and our memories are pleasant: this leaves us to enjoy our pleasures unanxiously.

Post by “Cassius” of October 16, 2023 at 6:16 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

[VS11](#): For most people, to be quiet is to be numb and to be active is to be frenzied.

I agree that this sounds like it could be related to the same topic in which the wise man can find pleasure in varying speeds of activity.

The overriding goal here ought to be to understand first what Epicurus is advising and then we will have plenty of time to decide how or if it helps to talk in terms of K/K distinctions.

Post by “Don” of October 16, 2023 at 6:24 PM

By Zeus! Y'all have been busy! It's gonna take me awhile to work through the posts and listen to the episode... But I promise I'll have thoughts 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of October 16, 2023 at 9:47 PM

This article that [Kalosyni](#) posted is a good read and has some pertinence to the discussion:

Post

[Article: "Lucretian Pleasures" by Sedley](#)

This article may be of benefit in understanding the nature of pleasure within Epicurean philosophy, and here is the abstract:

[...]

https://www.academia.edu/43841652/Lucretian_Pleasures



Kalosyni

October 11, 2023 at 11:07 AM

Post by “Don” of October 16, 2023 at 10:48 PM

Due to the fact that I seem to be unable to not have an opinion on this thread 😊 and that y'all have added a lot of interesting and in depth content, I'm going to simply work my way through chronologically starting at [Cassius](#) 's post 46. So, I apologize if something got superseded in the interim. I'm looking forward to this! Here we go!

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"Rest" implies sitting around doing nothing.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3417-episode-196-the-epicurean-arguments-in-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-06/>

To me, "rest" implies relaxation and rejuvenation. It implies taking a break to regroup. Saying it implies "Doing nothing" to me smacks of the Protestant maxim of "idle hands are the Devil's plaything."

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"kinetic" is going to evoke frenzy in English-speaking minds, "katastematic" is never going to evoke anything but "woo" or being "comatose" at best.

I have no problem not using the jargon, especially if you're thinking of how to evangelize. Kinetic and katastematic are in-house designations. But it behooves us to keep them in mind since the ancients evidently found them to be useful and important ways to define what they meant by pleasure, on several sides of the issue.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

why - if on a particular day we should reach 100% pleasure) we should want to live any longer.

That is a *really* unfortunate way of stating that question. A better way of looking at it is Fragment 490:

He who needs tomorrow least, most gladly greets the coming day.

It's not that someone doesn't *want* to live any longer; it has to do with gratitude for what you have. Being self-sufficient in yourself. Having the realization that "if this is it, I've lived well and taken pleasure in my life." Then, when the new day comes, being grateful that you have more life to experience. Not clinging to life with worry and anxiety about how long you have. Having more life is good, because life is good, but acknowledging the fullness of pleasure with the health of the body and the tranquility of the mind can be satisfying. Many times we run around, frenzied, trying to fill our day with activities. We need to slow down, rest, breathe, take a break, tune in to what our bodies are telling us.

So then, the wise one neither begs nor craves for living nor fears not living: Neither to set oneself against living, nor to imagine that it is evil to not live. Just as the most food is not chosen but that which brings the greatest pleasure; choose as well not the longest time but that in which one enjoys the fruits of that which bring the greatest pleasure.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's like asking why, if we climb to the top of Mount Everest, we should want to continue to live at all. No one but a Stoic or other warped personality would conclude that meeting a goal like that "once" is "good enough for a lifetime."

It's not anything like that. Climbing to the top of Everest is a discrete goal, one activity. As you say, it's meeting a goal..once. Maybe it's a lifetime goal to be done once. Then on to the next thing.

If I ever fully eradicate my fears and anxieties (I'm getting there... Slowly!), if I can really have health of the body and the tranquility of the mind, that kind of perspective will change my outlook on my life as a whole. If I truly learn to savor the moment - to really pluck the pleasure from each breath - to internalize and really feel a deep gratitude for my life but not cling to it, grasp, fret when it's going to end, I will no longer be enjoying it. Experience pleasure now. Experience pleasure tomorrow if it comes. That paradigm shift that comes with studying Epicurean philosophy is a powerful antidote to the Fear of Missing Out FOMO and endless rat race hustle mentality pedalled by modern society (and even similar to what Cicero was advocating)

And, in conclusion on commenting on post 46, I fully agree that [Philebus](#) no doubt had an outsized influence on any debate about pleasure in the ancient world. Have I read it yet? No I have not. Am I slightly embarrassed admitting that? Yes, yes I am. On the ever growing reading list... And now I have to read that new Sedley article [Kalosyni](#) found! Thanks for that one!!

Thus ends random thoughts on post 46 above. Sorry, I appear to be more verbose than I anticipated!

Post by “Don” of October 16, 2023 at 10:56 PM

[Quote from Cassius in post 47](#)

When your mind is not being excited, but is operating at its normal speed and doing its normal things, is that something that can be well conveyed in English using the word "static"?

No. I dislike that translation immensely. A better single word would be stable. Static sounds dead. Stable conveys to me something that is humming along, chugging away, working like it's supposed to. They are only "static" in the sense of being associated with a "state" of being.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

their standard state of good health and operation

... Like that.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Healthy operation of body and healthy operation of mind are not *that* hard to designate clearly, and we need to find better ways to do so.

How about just that: "Healthy operation of body and healthy operation of mind."

Post by “Don” of October 16, 2023 at 10:58 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

"Normal speed of mind operation" and "standard state of good health and operation of the senses" seem to me as very good descriptive attempts at the act of living. And this is close to my understanding of katastematic pleasure.

I REALLY like and also agree with the rest of your post, too, [TauPhi](#)!

Post by “Don” of October 16, 2023 at 11:12 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Could [VS11](#) possibly have any relevance in this discussion? If it does, it's certainly not explicit. It's set up as contrasting to something, but the question is what it's contrasting to. I've typically thought of it in terms of discussing people's actions, but what if it's about k/k pleasures. Admittedly, I'm probably reaching pretty far....

[VS11](#): *For most people, to be quiet is to be numb and to be active is to be frenzied.*

Here's my take on [VS11](#) that I've shared before;

Translation: For the majority of people, to be at rest is to be bored stiff; but to be active is to be raving like a rabid dog.

Comment: To me it seems to be saying there needs to be a balance of rest and activity, or that stillness is important and that most people don't recognize this. Plus those who don't understand are just running around to appear important or just simply to do something, they

can't be alone with their own thoughts... they're not self-reliant.

Plus, again we have active and rest: κινούμενον kinoumenon and ἡσυχάζον hēsykhazon, respectively. The first word is directly related to "kinetic", the second is a new one but means to be still, keep quiet, be at rest. I find it interesting that the "numb" is νάρκη narka, numbness, deadness, from which we get "narcotic."

I think [VS11](#) is a good catch, [Godfrey](#) !

Look at that, I'm up to post 53. The rest will have to wait until tomorrow. 🤔

Post by “Cassius” of October 17, 2023 at 8:52 AM

I would suggest that we can usefully apply David Sedley's comment about Epicurus being opposed to atomic reductionism to our discussion of pleasure. [His statement was](#): **"that there are truths at the microscopic level of elementary particles, and further very different truths at the phenomenal level; that the former must be capable of explaining the latter, but that neither level of description has a monopoly of truth."**

I would apply Sedley's perspective to discussion of key issues in pleasure this way:

Issue	Philosophical / 30,000 Foot / Whole Organism Level	Practical / Immediate / Discrete Feeling Level
-------	-------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------

Pleasure = the absence of pain because there are only two options, thus by definition the presence of one is the absence of the other. At the global level these words can be used interchangeably to refer to the full "net" experience of the organism. One hundred percent pleasure is desirable, and serves as a useful visualization of the goal. However the perfect is not the enemy of the good, and the wise man always has access to mental pleasures, and therefore he likely has more reason to evaluate his condition as pleasurable rather than vexatious, even when he is experiencing some pain. Examples such as Epicurus on his last day and the wise man under torture illustrate this, because both are examples of balancing mental pleasures against physical pains to conclude that life is worth living even under bad circumstances. To the extent we can at this level, we seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Relationship of Pleasure to Absence of Pain

While the terms "absence of pain" and "pleasure" can be used interchangeably to describe discrete feelings of agreeableness, discrete feelings vary tremendously in individual details like ice cream varies from sex, and have to be evaluated based on their intensity, duration, and location. If we use words that indicate that the pleasure of sex and the pleasure of ice cream are identical in every respect, or if we refer in non-philosophical conversation to ice cream or sex as "absence of pain," then we look ridiculous and obtuse. An individual feeling of body or mind is either (1) "pleasure / absence of pain," or (2) "pain / absence of pleasure." An individual feeling is not "both" or "neither" or "neutral" or "something else." It is **not** necessary to eliminate all pain before any pleasure is experienced, nor should we **always** seek to avoid every pain, because we sometimes choose pain to achieve a greater pleasure or lesser pain.

Height of
Pleasure

Height of Pleasure = Complete / Full / 100% Pleasure, and at this conceptual level it is not possible to improve or get better than 100%. It is possible at this level to say that anyone who is without pain is at the height of pleasure, and from this perspective they are experiencing the same pleasure. In the hypothetical, the host who is otherwise painless is said to be at the same height of pleasure as the guest (otherwise painless) who extinguishes his last pain of thirst by drinking. In this hypothetical, both host and guest are at the same "height of pleasure" because they are being stated to be without pain. Nothing about their respective feelings being identical is expressed or implied in this hypothetical. No one is confused that "being a host dispensing" and "being a guest receiving" is the same activity.

At the level of individual feelings, there is no natural way to identify one special feeling as "Height of Pleasure," because there is no Natural ranking of one discrete feeling of pleasure being intrinsically "best," or even intrinsically "better" or "worse," than another. Examples of heights can be given as (1) a person experiencing jubilation, such as the bare escape from some terrible way of dying, and (2) the experience of completely healthy regular functioning, such as Chrysippus' hand. But neither (1) nor (2) are 'better' than the other, and those feelings are certainly not identical. Both are part of a completely pleasurable life. If one such pleasure could be expanded to fill the whole being, then you would have the same result in regard to quantity just as at the 30,000 foot level, but the discrete experiences would still not be identical. This is so for the same reason that a painless host savoring his friendship with his guests is experiencing a pleasure that is different from the guest who is drinking wine. Both host and guest may be painless, but they are experiencing very different feelings.

Variation

At this highest level view, variation adds nothing to increasing the height of pleasure. If you are at the height of pleasure you want to stay there, by definition, and you neither need nor want to vary from that 100% status. You just want to maintain complete pleasure. "Variation" at this level adds nothing and at this level is not desirable.

At the level of discrete feelings variation is obviously desirable. Repeating exactly the same experience over and over in real life generally results in boredom or worse, and the action that originally produced pleasure starts producing pain. Variation is an aspect of the nature of pleasure of which Epicurus was well aware. He embraced variation both positively through his statements about the desirability of life, and by omission in not providing an exhaustive list of "do's" and "dont's" beyond a few general endorsements such as friendship and prudence and general warnings about hazardous activities likely to lead to more pain than pleasure.

So it seems to me essential to point out these differing perspectives are both "true," just as in regard to the atomic level.

"Nothing exists except atoms and void" becomes skepticism and nihilism in Democritus' hands, but in Epicurus' hands when seen in its proper context it supports confidence and enthusiasm for life, because: **"there are truths at the microscopic level of elementary particles, and further very different truths at the phenomenal level; [and] the former must be capable of explaining the latter, but ...neither level of description has a monopoly of truth."**

The same is true in the discussion of pleasure. Unless you keep both perspectives in focus and remember that both are true, it is easy to get confused and think "absence of pain" means nothingness and that variation is totally undesirable. In truth the case is very different: "absence of pain" really just means "every experience/feeling in life that is not painful" (which means "pleasure"), and "variation" is seen to refer to pleasures of day to day life are not only desirable but essential.

In a very general way it seems to me that these separate contexts are what Cicero is using to make his argument effective. He is switching contexts back and forth, and he is not allowing Torquatus to explain how these contexts are different and how they interrelate.

Post by “Don” of October 17, 2023 at 7:11 PM

Finally listened to the episode.

Well done!! KYΔOΣ kudos to everyone!