

# Article: "Lucretian Pleasures" by Sedley

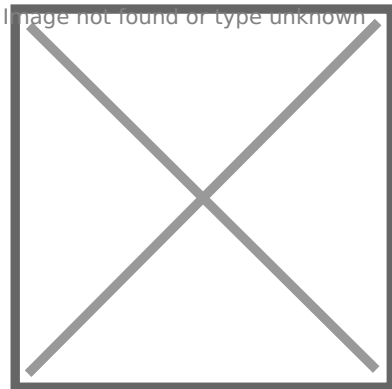
Post by "Kalosyni" of October 11, 2023 at 11:07 AM

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

Quote

Abstract:

This chapter's main aim is to bring into focus Lucretius' celebration of his own Epicurean pleasures. The DRN refers in its very first line to divine as well as human pleasures. It closes with the most frightful scene of bodily and mental pain, one that owing to the poem's evident incompleteness still lacks its Epicurean moral lesson about why even the most intense bodily pain need not be feared. In between those two extremities Lucretius offers a uniquely sensitive, and rarely appreciated, commentary on the meaning, boundaries and divine nature of true Epicurean pleasures, and on their intimate relationship to the study of physics, by one who can claim direct experience of their transformative effects.



[Lucretian Pleasures](#)

Lucretian Pleasures

www.academia.edu

---

Post by "Cassius" of October 17, 2023 at 6:37 AM

Ok as much as I like Sedley let me comment on one of the early paragraphs:

#### Quote

In Epicurean doctrine pleasures are divided into two kinds, the bodily and the mental; and within each of those two domains there are short-term “kinetic” pleasures, which lie primarily in hedonic processes such as eating or learning, and static (or “katastematic”) pleasures, which consist in the longer-term state of painlessness. Counter-intuitively, and notoriously, Epicureans insist that when all pain has gone and static pleasure has replaced it, the height of pleasure has already been reached. The added kinetic pleasures typically associated with luxurious living can, as they put it, ‘vary’ the static pleasure, but cannot increase it.

As Lucretius says in his second proem (2.16-19), “there is nothing else that nature barks out for than that pain should be absent from the body, and that the mind should enjoy pleasurable sensation while insulated from anxiety and fear.”

The heart of our recent discussions is the probability that "pleasure" and "painlessness" are being used by the Epicureans interchangeably, with no difference in meaning other than when referencing the situation that when all pain is gone then you are at 100% pleasure. The second sentence of [PD03](#) confirms the basic point that when you have "absence of one" you have "presence of the other," and Torquatus hammers this point unmistakably.

If so there is no reason to switch words from pleasure to painlessness in the first sentence quoted above. Even under Sedley's terms, kinetic refers to short-term pleasures, while katastematic refers to long-term pleasures, and the issue is duration, not a difference between "pleasure" and "something else."

Then Sedley uses "static" which most all of us agree is a poor choice of words to refer to normal healthy operation of body and mind.

It's this switching of words without being absolutely clear about the context that creates the ambiguity and resulting confusion.

I would suggest the paragraph would be more clear and correct worded this way:

*In Epicurean doctrine pleasures are divided into two kinds, the bodily and the mental; and within each of those two domains there are short-term “kinetic” pleasures, which lie primarily in processes of stimulation such as eating or learning, and longer-term (or “katastematic”) pleasures which lie primarily in operation of the organism not involving short-term stimulation, such as regular healthy operation of body or mind. In a very logical and common sense way, Epicureans insist that when all pain has gone and been replaced by pleasure, the full and*

*complete pleasure of the organism (the height of pleasure) has been reached. The added kinetic pleasures typically associated with luxurious living can, as they put it, 'vary' the condition of full and complete pleasure, but cannot increase it.*

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of October 17, 2023 at 7:07 AM**

This is a good line and is consistent with pleasure and absence of pain being interchangeable terms:

Quote

Pleasure, that is, consists not in mere lack of pain, but in perceiving in a painless way.

I would say also that "absence of pain" requires "perceiving"

---

### **Post by "Don" of October 17, 2023 at 7:33 AM**

Well done, [Cassius](#) ! I still need to read the paper, but I like Sedleys general point that "in Epicurean doctrine pleasures are divided into two kinds, the bodily and the mental; and within each of those two domains there are short-term "kinetic" pleasures, and *static* (or "katastematic") pleasures,"

I'm not sure, however, whether it should be that way or the other way. The way Epicurus states it is there are kinetic and katastematic pleasures, then gives examples. So, I think Sedley has it backwards. In the end, it might be semantic, but, using your (better) rephrasing, I might suggest:

*In Epicurean doctrine pleasures are divided into two kinds, short-term "kinetic" pleasures, which lie primarily in processes of stimulation such as eating or learning, and longer-term (or "katastematic") pleasures which lie primarily in the stable operation of the organism not involving short-term stimulation, such as regular healthy operation of body or mind. In each category, there are both bodily and mental pleasures. (and so on as you stated...)*

---

### **Post by "Don" of October 18, 2023 at 8:08 AM**

I think this line is good:

Quote from Sedley

Pleasure, that is, consists not in mere lack of pain, but in perceiving in a painless way. When it comes to the specifically mental supreme pleasure, freedom from anxiety, then, its attainment will lie, not in the mere absence of worry, but in perceiving the world with an entirely tranquil and worry-free frame of mind.

As I've mentioned elsewhere, I still intensely dislike the word "static" for καταστήματικός katastematic and even Sedley uses stable at the end of this section:

Quote from Sedley

We need be in no doubt that this godlike pleasure is a 'static pleasure', in the technical Epicurean sense of hēdonē katastēmatikē. Epicurus himself, if he enjoyed his voyage of discovery as we must assume he did, will have been enjoying a mental kinetic pleasure, the process of freeing himself from his previously painful fear and incomprehension about what the universe might threaten. Lucretius is silent about that kinetic pleasure of discovery, and sticks instead to a single Epicurean tenet: it is not the kinetic thrill of eliminating pain, but the resultant stable pleasure of peace of mind, that can make our own state fully equal to that of the gods.

I also like this:

Quote from Sedley

Epicurus' excellent point, that a tranquil life depends on the absence of anxiety around the clock, whether awake or asleep, is one that Lucretius takes to heart.

In the end, this paper seems to me to have a narrow (and somewhat disjointed) focus; but there are some good points.

---

## Post by "Don" of October 18, 2023 at 8:42 AM

Rather than harp on "I don't like static" here are some alternatives riffing off LSJ:

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

Restore to balance

Stable

Become quiet or calm

Settled

And so on.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2023 at 9:59 AM**

Not only does "static" imply absolutely unmoving, it's also in the modern world a synonym for "interference" or "disrupted receipt of a signal " or "no signal" - all of which are the opposite of what should be the focus as smooth operation or smooth signal.

---

### **Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2023 at 12:59 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Not only does "static" imply absolutely unmoving, it's also in the modern world a synonym for "interference" or "disrupted receipt of a signal " or "no signal" - all of which are the opposite of what should be the focus as smooth operation or smooth signal.

It occurs to me to say this too, in fairness to Sedley and "the academics." The academics aren't in the business of trying to explain how to put Epicurean philosophy to practical use for normal people. The academic writers are often just talking to each other. We have a different goal here, and so we don't have to stick to the academic wording. We have to be accurate and fair to the texts and the overall situation but we aren't bound by established usages any more than Epicurus was required to use terms in the same way as Plato or the others.