

# **Preuss - "Epicurean Ethics - Katastematic Hedonism"**

**Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2025 at 8:32 PM**

Let me start off this thread by making clear that the inclusion of this book here is not an endorsement by me. It's clear that the book contains a lot of good reference material, but at the time I am posting this I am going to start off by citing several sections that indicate that the author disagrees strongly in his interpretations of katastematic pleasure with both David Sedley and AA Long (Hellenistic Philosophers) and Gosling and Taylor (The Greeks on Pleasure). Given her footnote as to her agreement with Gosling and Taylor, we can probably also consider Emily Austin as another in disagreement with Pruess.

However this is an important topic and it's always good to go through something as basic and important as the question of whether the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure, and the elevation of katastematic pleasure as the true goal of Epicurean philosophy, is an accurate conclusion or a gross misreading or somewhere in between.

Here are some clips to get us started:

First, it appears that regardless of his views on pleasure, Preuss holds a very unconventional view on Epicurus' view of death. Preuss apparently believes that Epicurus held open the possibility of life after death, citing another article Preuss himself has written on reincarnation as containing potential evidence of which Epicurus was unaware.

We indicated in our third chapter that Epicurus did not consider the prospect of our final extinction to be a certainty because the arguments, though powerful, did not establish their conclusion with certainty, if only because no future tensed proposition can be true or false, but will always only be probable. Given the evidence he had, Epicurus was quite right that a person with a well developed intellectual conscience is not available to the siren call of mere promises; but for Epicurus, the philosophical theoretician, the issue is never finally closed. Were new evidence to come to light, his philosophical conscience would as surely enjoin him to listen as it would prevent his being impressed by a mere promise. Our question now is: if sufficient evidence were to come to light to make post-mortem existence more probable than extinction,<sup>457</sup> if Epicurus were wrong

<sup>457</sup>In fact there is some impressive evidence of which Epicurus was unaware. See, for example, my Reincarnation, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989.

The distinction is of central importance to understanding Epicurean ethics. Diogenes Laertius lists several books of Epicurus<sup>204</sup> in which he works on this distinction. As we shall see, katastematic pleasure is the most important concept in Epicurean ethics and, though it is not wrong to think that Epicurus took

<sup>202</sup>D.L. 10.136.

<sup>203</sup>Aristotle characterizes pleasure as "the activity of the natural state" (E.N. 1153a14) and observes that "there is not only an activity of movement but an activity of immobility, and pleasure is found more in rest than in movement." (E.N. 1154b28).

<sup>204</sup>D.L.10.136: On Choice and Avoidance, On the End, On Lives book 1, the letter to the philosophers in Mytilene.

he most important

Preuss is critical of Sedley and Long's interpretations of the same issue:

## Two Recent Interpretations

Anthony Long and David Sedley have collaborated to produce a wonderful study of Hellenistic philosophy.<sup>205</sup> Their treatment of Epicurus' distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure, however, and in particular of the ethically central concept of katastematic pleasure is disappointing. Kinetic

## Gosling and Taylor

Cicero should be read with caution, for when read with caution he is without doubt a valuable source of Epicurean thought. It is, of course, difficult to say just how far a commentator can be trusted once you have good reason to have reservations about his reports. But such reservations can be taken too far and it seems to me that the work of Gosling and Taylor is a case in point. In a major

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<sup>218</sup>cf. D.L. 10.118.

<sup>219</sup>cf. D.L. 10.22.

recent interpretation<sup>220</sup> of the Epicurean theory of pleasure they essentially ascribe the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure to Cicero, then undermine Cicero's credibility as a reliable source of authentic Epicureanism, with the effect that the distinction itself is almost eliminated.

It should be clear that Gosling and Taylor's interpretation is a dramatic departure from the norm of Epicurean scholarship in that it rejects what had previously been a fundamental point of agreement among diverse interpretations. They are, of course, aware of that and their argument reflects this in its thoroughness and detail. But their argument is unconvincing and it is important for us to see how it fails before offering our own reading of Epicurus' theory.

I haven't yet gotten into Preuss' own arguments but we can do that as time permits. Suffice it to say that he concludes as indicated above that "katatematic pleasure" is what Epicurus is all about.

And for the time being I'll just repeat personally that I am solidly with Sedley & Long, Gosling & Taylor, Emily Austin, and Boris [Nikolsky](#) (which summarizes much of this debate in his "Epicurus on Pleasure" article here in our files section).

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2025 at 8:54 PM**

I find at least one more excerpt on which to comment: Preuss is construing the well known fragment of Plutarch as to the escape from a near-death experience, which he admits is translatable as "joy," as a reference to katatematic pleasure:

for us by Plutarch:

Unsurpassable joy (anuperblēton gēthos) is produced by comparison with a great evil which one has escaped; and this is the nature of the good if one applies [one's intellect] properly and takes a firm stand, but does not stroll around babbling empty about the good.<sup>300</sup>

We are not interested now in the impatient gesture in this fragment. We have already discussed that in our second chapter. What interests us here is the joy of escaping a great evil. Shortly before giving us this fragment Plutarch lists examples of the sort of evil Epicurus might have had in mind from his own experience, examples such as the fury of mobs and the savagery of bandits. To have escaped an evil of that magnitude leaves one unscathed and it is difficult not to become aware of one's unscathed existence as such. This awareness is, according to Epicurus, a pleasure of the highest order if one is capable of apprehending it, a pleasure of such a high order that it deserves to be called the good. It is katastematic pleasure, the quasi-object of which is what has been there continuously the whole time, but is rarely apprehended as clearly as at such time of avoided catastrophe. We note here that katastematic pleasure too has degrees of intensity and anuperblēton gēthos is Epicurus' expression for what appears to be

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<sup>300</sup>Non posse 1091b = US. 423.

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## Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2025 at 9:15 PM

This excerpt from the conclusion probably goes to the heart of where Pruess ends up. It's interesting that one could almost take his "in the experience of katestematic pleasure life itself, the existence of the self, is seen to be good" and end up not all that far from DeWitt's argument that the greatest good is life itself.

But my core initial objection stems from the fact that I actually agree with him in calling katastematic pleasure an "evaluation." If I try to glean any specificity at all out of the word "katastematic," which I don't find Pruess to be able to do either, I come back to the conclusion that what people are thinking of as katastematic is itself an "activity." Considering katastematic

Katastematic pleasure, like kinetic pleasure, is in its nature a positive evaluation ent of the mind, and as I think about how "motion" but, unlike kinetic pleasure, it is not an evaluation of some object or other, rather think about how "motion" it is a self-evaluation. Katastematic pleasure is continuous pleasure taken in the aluative processes, to be continuous object by that object: it is in its nature a positive self-evaluation. In

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the experience of katastematic pleasure life itself, the existence of the self, is seen to be good. This evaluation is not simply a piece of information, a perceptual or cognitive item of which I am informed in the experience of katastematic pleasure. It is not simply the insight that some object matches some standard of goodness, for it is an experience which is as primordially evaluative as it is cognitive, or, to put it into more Epicurean language, it is an evaluation which is felt directly, not just known about. Pleasure, all pleasure, is self-evidently good. The pursuit of the object of pleasure may sometimes be seen to be bad in the Epicurean prudent deliberation on courses of action, which is why kinetic pleasure is always qualifiedly good, that is, a good to be chosen only if I have no reason to avoid it, which well I may. No such qualification applies to katastematic pleasure, for there is no pursuit of the object of katastematic pleasure.

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## Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2025 at 9:26 PM

I started to include this following clip earlier but will do so now. I agree with Preuss that Epicurus' position that the wise man is happy even under torture is extremely important and

pregnant with implications. But i do not agree with him that the reason that the wise man remains happy under torture is that he is experiencing "katastematic pleasure" while under torture. Nor do I think that Epicurus was happy on his last day due to "katastematic pleasure."

I think that Epicurus considered himself happy even during kidney pain, and the wise man under torture can be considered happy even under torture, not because he is in fact experiencing some kind of indescribable state of feeling, but because in both cases we're making a mental evaluation of the entire scope of the life in question, and choosing to look at the good as outweighing the bad. That's a conscious mental evaluation and takes great effort to appreciate, and anything that takes great effort to understand and appreciate is a mental activity that requires a lot more than thinking that just as a matter of the blessedness of nature we can store up some kind of superhuman reservoir of "katastematic pleasure" to call on when we are under torture. Were that true, then Epicurus would have wanted to continue to live on indefinitely despite his kidney pain, and that's where it becomes important whether Epicurus in fact committed suicide or hastened his own death. "Katastematic pleasure" doesn't outweigh unrelenting extended interminable extreme kinetic pain.

Being alive and conscious means our minds having an ongoing evaluation of whether our lives have been and are worthwhile, the vast majority of which time has been spent in "kinetic" activities, and there's nothing mysterious about that or necessary to identify as some kind of special or higher or "katastematic" pleasure that is our "true goal."

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the stable condition of the flesh (*sarkos eustathes katastēma*). As we have already noted above, this condition is identified by Epicurus as a kinetic pleasure and cannot, if only for that reason, count as a definition of pleasure. The idea that we have here a definition of pleasure is in any event an addition by Gellius which probably was not meant seriously in any technical sense. We shall not comment in detail on the notion of *katastematic* pleasure here since that would be difficult to do briefly without simply presupposing a reading of *katastematic* pleasure which we have not yet given. But we might point out here that Epicurus thought that *katastematic* pleasure was possible under torture<sup>218</sup> which cannot be thought to be a stable or a comfortable condition of the flesh; and, if *katastematic* pleasure can be identified with happiness, then Epicurus' claim that he was happy, even blessed, near death and while in great kinetic pain,<sup>219</sup> also indicates that *katastematic* pleasure is compatible with kinetic pain and an unstable condition of the body. Such considerations, and others, should make us very hesitant to adopt the essentially Ciceronian interpretation of kinetic and *katastematic* pleasure in terms of satisfying and satisfied desire.

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## Post by “DistantLaughter” of July 12, 2025 at 9:55 PM

The core initial objection rightly highlights a significant conceptual tension within the *katastematic*/kinetic distinction: if *katastematic* pleasure is understood as an evaluative mental process, can it truly be regarded as a form of “rest” or non-motion? This challenge exposes the difficulty of neatly categorizing complex mental phenomena within rigid binaries.

However, this critique may rest on an overly restrictive interpretation of “motion” and “rest” in the context of Epicurean psychology. The evaluative activity constitutive of *katastematic* pleasure need not be equated with the disruptive or agitative motions characteristic of sensory or passionate pleasures. Instead, it can be conceived as a stable, reflective cognitive state—an ongoing but tranquil affirmation—that preserves *ataraxia* rather than undermines it. Thus,

“motion” here need not imply mental agitation but can signify a subtle, sustained cognitive engagement consistent with mental tranquility.

Furthermore, the *katastematic/kinetic* distinction itself is a later philosophical construct imposed retrospectively on Epicurus’s thought, which was far more fluid and pragmatic. Mental phenomena, especially within Epicurean ethics, resist simplistic binary classification, and it is plausible that *katastematic* pleasure encompasses a spectrum of minimally active evaluative states that nonetheless maintain serene equanimity.

Ironically, this very dispute over categorical precision—arguably a kinetic agitation of the mind—may itself undermine the Epicurean ideal of peace of mind (*ataraxia*) that these concepts aim to clarify. The passionate contestation over definitions risks generating precisely the mental disturbance that Epicurean ethics seeks to avoid, underscoring the limitations of philosophical categorization when it becomes an end in itself rather than a means to tranquility.

Ultimately, the challenge invites us to exercise interpretive humility and to balance conceptual rigor with sensitivity to the lived experience and pragmatic aims of Epicurean philosophy.

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## Post by “Cassius” of July 12, 2025 at 10:46 PM

A pleasure to engage with you in this....

### [Quote from DistantLaughter](#)

Furthermore, the *katastematic/kinetic* distinction itself is a later philosophical construct imposed retrospectively on Epicurus’s

Now that is essentially the position taken by [Nikolsky](#) in concluding that Epicurus did NOT put a great deal of emphasis on the kinetic / *katastematic* position. Do you agree with that ?

### [Quote from DistantLaughter](#)

Ironically, this very dispute over categorical precision—arguably a kinetic agitation of the mind—may itself undermine the Epicurean ideal of peace of mind (*ataraxia*) that these concepts aim to clarify.

This is why I reject the idea that "peace of mind" is the ultimate goal of Epicurean philosophy. I would say the goal is "pleasure" and that pleasure entails a great deal of mental and physical activity.

When Lucretius understood to explain the philosophy to Memmious, he did not say "give up all your possessions and goals, live ascetically, eat simply, and just breathe - get out of the way and clear your mind and all will be sweetness and light."

Instead, he launched off on six books of highly polemical argument about what knowledge and training is needed to live the best life. Just like Epicurus devoted himself to 37 books on nature and Diogenes of Oinoanda built his wall.

What I object to most strenuously is the idea that Epicurus calls us to disengage with all normal activity of the mind and body, and to consider that at best to be a necessary requirement of some kind of ineffable mental state that no one can really explain other than as a kind of neostoic or neobuddhist mental detachment from the way the world and all other living things in it really operate.

Granted the conclusion of the book is not quite so stark, and draws back from such a conclusion as if we are not good enough to achieve it, but setting that kind of thing up as a goal seems to me to be much more appropriate for the aforementioned Stoics and Buddhists than for someone who is convinced that this life is the only one we have.

And that's why I was particularly surprised to see the expression of doubt as to death being nothing to us and an apparent favorable reference to reincarnation.

You have clearly thought of these things before so I look forward to your further thoughts.

But I am afraid our time zone issues will now slow us down. 😊

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## Post by "DistantLaughter" of July 12, 2025 at 10:56 PM

Hi Cassius, thanks for the engagement.

#1

I'm sympathetic to [Nikolsky's](#) view that the katastematic/kinetic distinction, as commonly deployed, is a later conceptual imposition rather than a central Epicurean principle. While later sources like Cicero and Diogenes Laertius develop this framework, the extant writings of Epicurus suggest a more fluid and pragmatic focus on the removal of pain and fear as the path to tranquility—without rigid typologies. Thus, I tend to agree that Epicurus did not place strong emphasis on this distinction, at least not in the technical sense that later interpreters project onto him.

#2

Thanks for this strong and well-articulated response—I genuinely appreciate your clarity and conviction. I think we may agree more than it seems, though we might diverge on emphasis and interpretive framing.

You're absolutely right that pleasure, not "peace of mind" as such, is the goal of Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus is explicit about this in the *Letter to Menoeceus*. But where the disagreement often arises is over *what kind* of pleasure constitutes the telos. When Epicurus says the wise man "does not choose the greatest quantity of food but the most pleasant," the pleasant turns out to be that which contributes to a tranquil and painless state of body and mind—a *katastematic* condition, even if he doesn't use that term himself. So, when some people talk about "peace of mind" as the goal, they're typically using it as shorthand for that condition of *ongoing, stable pleasure* free from turmoil—rather than as a mystical or detached asceticism.

I completely agree that Epicureanism is not about disengagement from life. That's where I think your reading is most powerful. The lives of Epicurus, Lucretius, and Diogenes of Oinoanda show that the philosophy demands intellectual work, even polemic, in service of freeing people from fear and confusion. But the goal of that labor is precisely to attain and preserve a state of freedom from disturbance, not to glorify striving or motion for its own sake. That's why the "agitation" over fine distinctions can ironically work *against* the aim of those distinctions.

The concern isn't that activity itself is bad—Epicurus himself wrote extensively and encouraged philosophical conversation—but that we should choose activity wisely, guided by whether it contributes to lasting pleasure and peace. So in that light, the worry about "disengagement" might misfire if it treats tranquility as a withdrawal rather than a cultivated condition of maximal enjoyment, given the constraints of mortal life.

As for the references to death and reincarnation, I'm with you: Epicurus is unambiguous—[death is nothing to us](#). Any move toward ambiguity there would indeed be surprising, and potentially inconsistent with the core doctrines.

I look forward to continuing this discussion when the time zones allow—very glad to be engaging with someone who's clearly thought deeply and personally about these questions.

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## Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2025 at 6:40 AM

Sounds like you are correct and given your explanation we are not so far apart as might first appear.

However there may be one issue where we simply have a different diagnosis of the prevailing situation:

#### [Quote from DistantLaughter](#)

the pleasant turns out to be that which contributes to a tranquil and painless state of body and mind—a katastematic condition, even if he doesn't use that term himself. So, when some people talk about "peace of mind" as the goal, they're typically using it as shorthand for that condition of ongoing, stable pleasure free from turmoil—rather than as a mystical or detached asceticism.

I note that in the underlined section you use the word "some" and so with that caveat I can certainly agree with you on even this statement.

However I would diagnose that the number of people at least in today's world, and I would probably carry this back even to Cicero's time, and certainly to the time when Stoicism and then Judeo-Christianity took over the West, are not seeing "tranquility" or even "peace of mind" in that way.

Rather, my view is that there is strong tendency to see tranquility as detachment and indifference and apathy and eventually even to asceticism and nihilism.

By coincidence we are going through section 3 of Tusculan Disputations right now, and my observation is that the greater and now prevailing danger in the word is that people see it as Cicero describes the Stoics as seeing it as here in subsection X:

#### Quote

Therefore compassion and envy are consistent in the same man; for whoever is uneasy at any one's adversity, is also uneasy at another's prosperity: as Theophrastus while he laments the death of his companion Callisthenes, is at the same time disturbed at the success of Alexander; and therefore he says, that Callisthenes met with a man of the greatest power and good fortune, but one who did not know how to make use of his good fortune. And as pity is an uneasiness which arises from the misfortunes of another, so envy is an uneasiness that proceeds from the good success of another: therefore whoever is capable of pity, is capable of envy. But a wise man is incapable of envy, and consequently incapable of pity. But were a wise man used to grieve, to pity also would be familiar to him; therefore to grieve, is a feeling which cannot affect a wise man. Now, though these reasonings of the Stoics, and their conclusions, are rather strained and distorted, and ought to be expressed in a less stringent and narrow manner, yet great stress is to be laid on the opinions of those men who have a

peculiarly bold and manly turn of thought and sentiment.

When one stresses tranquility or peace of mind as the goal, rather than a more normal understanding of pleasure as a wide variety of both physical and mental pleasures involving not only "rest" but also "activity," the logical result of such a stress for those who do not have an extensive background in reading Epicurus (or even for those who do) is going to conclude that nothing in life is worth being "disturbed" or losing one's "peace of mind." Even Cicero acknowledges that this is perverse reasoning, and yet he endorses it anyway as worthy of admiration.

That's the kind of conclusion I even see in Preuss' final chapter, as if it is a good argument that we can take comfort that the world would not fall apart if everyone were Epicurean because people would not actually be so extreme as to take katastematic pleasure to its logical conclusion.

To me that is an absolute loser of an argument and an analysis, and there is no way that Epicurus would have "taken the Roman world by storm" if he had been understood to be saying so.

But today, when there is much more evidence in people adopting views such as Buddhism or nihilism or modern Stoicism that people are in fact taking the desire for "calm" to such an extreme, it seems to me it is even more important than ever not to add more fuel to that fire through argument that the evidence indicates that Epicurus himself did not stress.

It's definitely become my view in recent years that the study of Epicureanism demands an initial grounding in explaining how Epicurus used critically important words in non-standard ways, and I would definitely add Tranquility / calmness / ataraxia to that list that needs explanation. But I also think that the opening explanation starts not at calmness and tranquility, which everyone including me sees as a desirable quality at least most of the time, but at "Pleasure," which is where Preuss is giving an example of how the problem is that Epicurus is alleged to have subtracted much of the normal and ordinary meaning of the word, rather than having added the additional observation that life itself is so valuable that every aspect of it needs to be treasured so long as that aspect is not explicitly painful.

As in reference the Chrysippus' challenge in On Ends Book One as to the hand in its normal state being in a state of pleasure, and even in highest pleasure, it is necessary to understand that immobility and detachment from all action is not the "normal state" of a hand, and it would be perverse to interpret the logical sparring between Stoics and Epicureans in that way. The normal state of a hand or any other part of the body implies it is in good working condition, and setting out "calmness" as description of that working condition is an invitation to disastrous conclusions.

And to close this post that's exactly why I believe the consensus that "tranquility" is the goal rather than "pleasure" has become so strong -- because so many people (not the ancient Epicureans themselves, but their opponents -- are more than happy to use any argument available to them to divest "pleasure" of its full meaning. I recognize that there are many people in good faith who come to this conclusion for the most good-hearted of reasons, and I wouldn't doubt that Preuss is one of them. But to clearly entitle a book as he did that the true goal of Epicurean philosophy is not "Pleasure" but "Katastematic Hedonism" is to either subconsciously or consciously extend a trend which has doomed Epicurean Philosophy to being considered as an oddly-worded subset of Stoicism for many generations.

And that's a situation that needs to be changed.

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## Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2025 at 6:56 AM

I see that the next paragraph in Tusculan Disputations (which we by coincidence were planning to discuss today in our podcast recording) makes the issue even more clear: When you focus on "tranquility" or "absence of disturbance" as one's ultimate goal, you are impelled to the conclusion that all strong emotions -- including joy -- are "perturbations" or "disorders" of the mind.

To what conclusion does this lead? That we should "exert our utmost efforts to oppose these perturbations—which are, as it were, so many furies let loose upon us, and urged on by folly—if we are desirous to pass this share of life that is allotted to us with ease and satisfaction."

### [Quote from Tusculan Disputations Part 3 Section XI](#)

The whole cause, then, is in opinion; and this observation applies not to this grief alone, but to every other disorder of the mind, which are of four sorts, but consisting of many parts. For as every disorder or perturbation is a motion of the mind, either devoid of reason, or in despite of reason, or in disobedience to reason, and as that motion is excited by an opinion of either good or evil; these four perturbations are divided equally into two parts: for two of them proceed from an opinion of good, one of which is an exulting pleasure, that is to say, a joy elated beyond measure, arising from an opinion of some present great good; the other is a desire which may fairly be called even a lust, and is an immoderate inclination after some conceived great good, without any obedience to reason. Therefore these two kinds, the exulting pleasure, and the lust, have their rise from an opinion of good, as the other two, fear and grief, have from an opinion of evil. For fear is an opinion of some great evil impending over us, and grief is an opinion of some great evil present; and, indeed, it is a freshly conceived opinion of

an evil so great, that to grieve at it seems right: it is of that kind, that he who is uneasy at it thinks he has good reason to be so. Now we should exert our utmost efforts to oppose these perturbations—which are, as it were, so many furies let loose upon us, and urged on by folly—if we are desirous to pass this share of life that is allotted to us with ease and satisfaction. But of the other feelings I shall speak elsewhere; our business at present is to drive away grief if we can, for that shall be the object of our present discussion, since you have said that it was your opinion that a wise man might be subject to grief, which I can by no means allow of; for it is a frightful, miserable, and detestable thing, which we should fly from with our utmost efforts—with all our sails and oars, as I may say.

I would argue that if that sort of conclusion had been what Epicurus taught his philosophy would never have become popular in the Roman world at all, and likewise it is deadly to Epicurean philosophy today. And that attitude is especially deadly to Epicurean Philosophy being embraced by younger people, who I believe are instinctively able to see the dangers involved.

I'm no longer young myself and so I am more tolerant of those who do begin to elevate "tranquility" in order of importance as they age and the pains of life increase, but I think we owe it to ourselves, to others, and to Epicurus not to allow our own personal problems to overshadow a very different perspective that it seems to me clearly entails a much more active and positive assessment of life.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2025 at 7:17 AM**

On the same thing we have some excellent material coming up in future weeks on the podcast, including this from Cicero just a little further down than what is quoted above. Here Cicero is referring to Epicurus and quoting him directly to show how Epicurus hammered home the point that pleasure is a term that includes the normal active pleasures. This results in a view that is *wider* than generally understood, not *narrower*:

#### [Quote from Tusculan Disputations Part 3 Section XVIII](#)

Now, should any one, as the same author says, find his spirits sink with the loss of his fortune, he must apply to those grave philosophers of antiquity for relief, and not to

these voluptuaries: for what great abundance of good do they promise? Suppose that we allow that to be without pain is the chief good? yet that is not called pleasure. But it is not necessary at present to go through the whole: the question is, to what point are we to advance in order to abate our grief? Grant that to be in pain is the greatest evil; whosoever, then, has proceeded so far as not to be in pain, is he, therefore, in immediate possession of the greatest good? Why, Epicurus, do we use any evasions, and not allow in our own words the same feeling to be pleasure, which you are used to boast of with such assurance? Are these your words or not? This is what you say in that book which contains all the doctrine of your school; for I will perform, on this occasion, the office of a translator, lest any one should imagine that I am inventing anything. Thus you speak: “Nor can I form any notion of the chief good, abstracted from those pleasures which are perceived by taste, or from what depends on hearing music, or abstracted from ideas raised by external objects visible to the eye, or by agreeable motions, or from those other pleasures which are perceived by the whole man by means of any of his senses; nor can it possibly be said that the pleasures of the mind are excited only by what is good; for I have perceived men's minds to be pleased with the hopes of enjoying those things which I mentioned above, and with the idea that it should enjoy them without any interruption from pain.” And these are his exact words, so that any one may understand what were the pleasures with which Epicurus was acquainted. Then he speaks thus, a little lower down: “I have often inquired of those who have been called wise men, what would be the remaining good if they should exclude from consideration all these pleasures, unless they meant to give us nothing but words? I could never learn anything from them; and unless they choose that all virtue and wisdom should vanish and come to nothing, they must say with me, that the only road to happiness lies through those pleasures which I mentioned above.” What follows is much the same, and his whole book on the chief good everywhere abounds with the same opinions.

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## Post by “Bryan” of July 13, 2025 at 10:46 AM

[Quote from DistantLaughter](#)

Furthermore, the katastematic/kinetic distinction itself is a later philosophical construct imposed retrospectively on Epicurus’s thought,

[Quote from DistantLaughter](#)

a katastematic condition, even if he doesn't use that term himself.

I am not sure it is possible to say that Epicurus did not use the term, or that it is a later construct, given Diogenes Laertius' direct quote without the use of any indirect speech or an attribution to a secondary source.

10.136: "Epicurus in his book *On Choice* speaks in this way 'Tranquility and Painlessness exist as established (katastēmatikái) pleasures, but Cheer and Merriment are seen from movement through activity.'"

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### Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2025 at 10:58 AM

#### [Quote from Bryan](#)

I am not sure it is possible to say that Epicurus did not use the term, or that it is a later construct, given that Diogenes Laertius' direct quote without the use of any indirect speech or an attribution to a secondary source.

I agree that DL clearly says that, so it would be unlikely that he "did not use the term." But the reasons for argument that the extreme focus on this distinction was introduced later is what was advanced by Gosling and Taylor and summarized in the Boris [Nikolsky](#) article (click on Nikosky's name and it will come up).

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### Post by “Don” of July 13, 2025 at 11:08 AM

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

- in [Epicurus'] work *On Choice and Avoidance*
- and in [Epicurus'] *On the Ethical End*,
- and in [Epicurus'] first book of his work *On Human Life*

- and in [Epicurus'] epistle to his philosopher friends in Mytilene.
  - So also Diogenes in the seventeenth book of his Epilecta,
  - and Metrodorus in his Timocrates, whose actual words are : "Thus pleasure being conceived both as that species which consists in motion and that which is a state of rest."
  - The words of Epicurus in his work On Choice [and Avoidance] are : "Peace of mind and freedom from pain are pleasures which imply a state of rest ; joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity."
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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2025 at 11:29 AM**

Yes all of those imply that Epicurus recognized a distinction, and we certainly know as well that Epicurus had a much more expansive definition of pleasure.

What those don't state or imply is that Epicurus held pleasures of rest to be more important than those of motion, or that pleasures of rest are the end goal of pleasures of motion. And in fact those very statements make the opposite point, that Epicurus recognized both.

And that is the ultimate dispute, which leads certain people to conclude that the real essence of Epicurean philosophy is "Katastematic Hedonism," rather than pleasure.

None of these authorities such as Gosling and Taylor or [Nikolsky](#) or the rest allege that the distinction was unknown to Epicurus, only that he did not place it at the center of his philosophy or consider it to be his most important ethical concept, which is the way that Pruess phrases it.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/5730-image-png/>

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### **Post by “DistantLaughter” of July 13, 2025 at 4:39 PM**

Thanks, Cassius—this has been an extremely clarifying exchange. I don't have much more to add, except to say that I now see even more clearly the importance of resisting any framing that elevates *katastematic* pleasure above other forms, or that risks collapsing Epicurean pleasure into mere tranquility. You're right to emphasize that Epicurus affirmed both active and stable pleasures—and that hedonism, for him, was never a euphemism for detachment.

The Cicero passage you quoted makes that unmistakably clear. If Epicurus had meant to subordinate the full range of bodily and emotional pleasures to stillness or quietude, he would

never have written the way he did. So while I still think terms like "peace of mind" can have a useful role if carefully defined, I fully agree that we must take care not to let that language obscure the breadth and vitality of Epicurean pleasure.

Thanks again for pressing the issue—and thanks as well to Don and Bryan for supplying the excellent supporting quotes/citations. Nothing more from me on this for now.

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### **Post by “Bryan” of July 13, 2025 at 5:20 PM**

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

Preuss holds a very unconventional view on Epicurus' view of death. Preuss apparently believes that Epicurus held open the possibility of life after death

To claim that Epicurus in any way accepted the idea of "life after death" is a misapplication of his *denial that all statements about the future must be either true or false*.

I think we can all agree that Preuss is far off the mark here.

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### **Post by “Titus” of July 14, 2025 at 7:27 PM**

#### [Quote from DistantLaughter](#)

I don't have much more to add, except to say that I now see even more clearly the importance of resisting any framing that elevates katastematic pleasure above other forms, or that risks collapsing Epicurean pleasure into mere tranquility.


IMHO this is the championship of Epicureanism: Integrating a life reform into real existing experiences. We have to acknowledge that very extraordinary approach: Epicurus offers refinement of the existential building blocks of life without denial of them. This is somewhat different from the "path-to-enlightenment-with-departure-from-ourselves"-strategy. That life can be good and the stimulus of pleasure, as simple as it is, can be something coherent in an advanced philosophical framework - this just sounds scandalous to many people and hardly to believe.


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## Post by “Eikadistes” of July 15, 2025 at 12:45 AM

Side-note: AI is now citing the interpretations presented in this forum:

✦ AI Overview

Peter Preuss is a scholar known for his interpretation of Epicurean ethics, particularly focusing on **katastematic pleasure as the central concept**. He challenges traditional interpretations of Epicurean philosophy, especially those of Sedley and Long, and Gosling and Taylor, by emphasizing the importance of **ataraxia** (freedom from disturbance) and **aponia** (absence of pain) as the highest forms of pleasure in Epicurean thought. Preuss's work, such as **Epicurean Ethics: Katastematic Hedonism**, explores these ideas in detail. 



Here's a more detailed breakdown: 

**Katastematic Hedonism:**

Preuss argues that katastematic pleasure, which involves a state of equilibrium and absence of pain and disturbance, is the ultimate goal in Epicurean ethics, rather than **kinetic pleasure** (pleasures derived from activity and change).

**Challenging Interpretations:**

Preuss's view contrasts with some interpretations that prioritize kinetic pleasures or downplay the significance of ataraxia and aponia, **according to a post on [www.epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)**. He argues that these states of mental and physical tranquility are not merely means to an end, but are themselves the highest forms of pleasure.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of July 15, 2025 at 4:38 AM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

Side-note: AI is now citing the interpretations presented in this forum:

I entered this question into Google: "does ai on Google search prioritize websites you have previously viewed"

And here was the ai reply:

Quote

"Yes, Google Search's AI algorithms do factor in your past browsing and search history to personalize your search results"

So then this means that everyone gets slightly different results on their Google queries.

Here is second query and the first part of what Google ai said:

Quote

Yes, search results on Google (or any major search engine) can vary for different users even when they enter the same search query. This is due to a combination of personalization and contextual factors.

Here's why:

- **Personalization:**

Google uses your past search history, location, language settings, and other factors to tailor results for you, making them more relevant to your interests and needs.

...

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## Post by “Martin” of July 15, 2025 at 5:06 AM

The worst part of that AI overview is that the AI misrepresents our position in a way that it appears to contradict Epicurus' philosophy. A reader with some familiarity with Epicurus but not us is likely to dismiss [epicureanfriends.com](https://www.epicureanfriends.com).

This shows that attempts to countercheck AI by letting it contrast different positions may still lead to misleading nonsense. You already need to be an expert to make good use of AI.

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## Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2025 at 5:35 AM

And yet at the same time that we point out the problems with AI, we can predict with grim certainty that AI is going to take the world by storm just as Epicurus took Italy in the time of Cicero, with AI's influence being much less beneficial.

This will require a lot of thought and effort to begin to develop strategies to deal with it, because for most of the world it's happening fast and there will be no turning back. It will be like the past and current battle of viewpoints on Wikipedia, but on steroids.

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of July 15, 2025 at 9:46 AM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

And here was the ai reply:

Quote

"Yes, Google Search's AI algorithms do factor in your past browsing and search history to personalize your search results"

**No doubt.**

**This is why everyone in the forum should be aware that your search queries are going to use confirmation bias as a tool to provide you with *satisfying* (not necessarily *true*) results.**

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Quote

Here's why:

- **[Personalization:](#)**

Google uses your past search history.

...

**Good guess, AI, but not true in this case.**

**Working in IT for almost 13 years now, I browse anonymously, use a VPN, auto-clear my cache, turned off search history, and removed all personalization related to Google.**

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Quote

- ...location, language settings....

This is probably it.

It's another example of AI restricting its presentation based on assumptions it is making about the user in an effort to be helpful. Like any algorithm, it wants to satisfy you with compelling information, not necessary thorough and accurate data. It's just a well-read stranger on the street with a big vocabulary. We have to cross-reference everything it claims.

We have some experts here. If anyone wants information on Library and Informational Science, [Don](#) is your resource, not AI. If you have questions about American jurisprudence, you'll get a more functional, accurate answer from [Cassius](#) than AI. When I'm looking for help with language, academic dictionaries are great, but not always as great as [Elli](#) who is living and breathing the language everyday, or [Bryan](#) who is constantly advancing his study.

I am concerned about the growing tendency (I observe) to automatically use AI as a resource. I'm seeing my family asking it medical advice instead of their doctor, and people with college degrees asking it to construct paragraphs for them in e-mails, and people going for their Master's degrees getting suspended for allowing AI to write their papers for them. *What's going on?*

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**Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2025 at 9:57 AM**

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

I am concerned about the growing tendency (I observe) to automatically use AI as a resource. I'm seeing my family asking it medical advice instead of their doctor, and people with college degrees asking it to construct paragraphs for them in e-mails, and people going for their Master's degrees getting suspended for allowing AI to write their papers for them. What's going on?

Yep, it's like a Japanese Godzilla movie with the monster rising out of the ocean, but short of global thermonuclear war I don't see what can stop it! I suppose the usual course of events is that some other weapon / technology has to arise to oppose it.

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of July 15, 2025 at 3:37 PM

It knows everything. 😄

Ask it anything, no matter how absurd.

★ AI Overview

It's impossible to give a precise number of gorillas that would fit in a short bus. The answer would depend on the size of the gorillas, the size of the short bus, and how tightly they are packed. However, a shortbus (also known as a school bus) typically holds around 20-30 students, and gorillas are larger than children. It's safe to assume that a short bus could comfortably hold a smaller number of gorillas than students, possibly 5-10 adult gorillas, depending on the specific gorilla and bus sizes. 🌐



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### Post by “Eikadistes” of August 14, 2025 at 11:26 AM

A passing thought I recently had about using AI:

*I hear that a profuse change in the world disposes you toward generating content with AI. As long as you neither disregard practice and rehearsal, nor demand the respect of others, nor disrupt the artistic profitability of others, nor ruin your own reputation, nor profit from plagiarism, do as you please according to your own preference. It is impossible however not to be a little constrained by at least one of these complications; therefore AI is never advantageous, and desirable only if it has not caused harm.*

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**Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2025 at 11:57 AM**

Very good use of a very good cite!