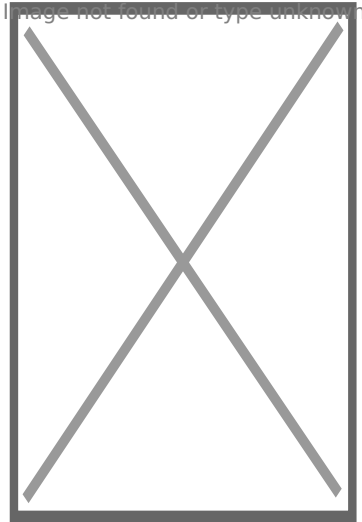


Plutarch's Major Works Against Epicurus

Post by “Cassius” of July 30, 2025 at 10:30 AM

Are collected in this volume (428) of the Loeb collections of Plutarch:



[Plutarch's Moralia in sixteen volumes. Vol.14: 1086C-1147A \[Loeb 428\] : Plutarchus / Plutarch \(46 - ca. 122\) : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)
archive.org

I've set up a separate folder for each of the three major works in this subforum.

Post by “DaveT” of July 30, 2025 at 1:39 PM

[Cassius](#) Thank you for posting the above. I found the Introduction from pps. 2-10 very clearly described the translation of Plutarch that followed. And in particular, at p.4 the following quote caught my attention regarding our discussion on last Sunday's zoom comparing and contrasting the two types of pleasures Epicurus said we experience."

"Pleasure, according to the Epicureans, is the highest good ; it is the ultimate aim of all our activities past, present, and future. It is of two kinds, pleasure of a settled state, and pleasure in motion. The settled pleasure is the same as the absence of pain ; indeed only those pleasures in movement are chosen that are incidental to the riddance of pain.

Such are the pleasures of the body. Pleasure of the mind is a reflection of these. Absence of perturbation (atarazia) corresponds to the settled pleasures of the body, and animation (euphrosyné) at the anticipation or remembrance of a pleasure in movement of the body is a pleasure in movement of the mind. Because it is not limited to the present but draws also on past and future, pleasure of the mind admits of greater stability and permanence than pleasure of the body ; it is thus the proper object of the philosophical life.”

Does anyone care to elaborate on this explanation?

Post by “Cassius” of July 30, 2025 at 2:33 PM

Dave:

Those two paragraphs are the rather standard explanation which you will read everywhere and be told to accept as unchallengeable. You will be told in most places (NOT here) to accept this formulation if you wish to be accepted as a standard Epicurean.

If you choose to look further, however, you can read the authorities such as Gosling & Taylor's "The Greeks On Pleasure," Boris [Nikolsky](#), and Emily Austin (who follows Gosling & Taylor) and become a dissident who concludes that this formulation as stated loosely by many writers today is very wrong and leads to self-contradictory conclusions that Epicurus did not hold.

This formulation presumes that as soon as you discuss "pleasure" in Epicurean terms, you have to immediately (here, the very second sentence) break pleasure down into these two categories of "settled" and "motion." You are then led down the road to conclude that the pleasures of motion are really important only to the extent that they assist in the achievement of pleasures that are "settled."

Now of course certain aspects of this are beyond doubt, such as statements that "pleasure is the highest good." The issue is not that pleasure is the good, but whether it is essential to break pleasure down into these two categories and determine that some of which are more important than the other, and are in fact the REAL meaning of "pleasure."

Quote

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I don't have a great deal of problem with this summary as far as it goes. But this line of thinking usually proceeds to conclude that "settled" pleasures are the real purpose of Epicurus, and that these are generally mental, and that everything else is subservient to attaining these so-called settled mental pleasures (and of course we're talking about the word *katastematic*). After all, is the argument, Epicurus said that when do not have pain we have no need for pleasure, so of course that means that the real goal is "absence of pain" and means we don't need pleasure at all. Right??????

If you can read all that and continue to understand that ALL pleasures are valued by Epicurus, and that Epicurus does NOT tell you to consider all other pleasures of the body and mind, including joy and delight, as second-class citizens, then no harm is done. In my experience I find that is very hard to do, and that most people who talk frequently about *katastematic* pleasure are deprecating all other types as really important.

So I observe that it is very difficult to go down this road of talking in terms of "types of pleasure" (*ataraxia*, calmness, tranquility, worthy pleasures, etc) without eventually dropping the term "pleasure" except as a code word for the initiated who know that pleasure doesn't include bodily pleasure or active mental pleasure at all.

I urge anyone who is interested in this topic to read the full chapter in Gosling and Taylor where they take apart this formulation and examine the harm that can come from interpreting the distinction as favoring *katastematic* over kinetic pleasure.

Failing reading that whole chapter, there is a shorter article here on the forum by Boris [Nikolsky](#) which also summarizes the issue and discusses how the interpretation of this distinction given by Cicero and others (*Carneades* is mentioned) causes so much confusion.

And failing that, as a last resort, I urge anyone toying with these formulations to consider whether they really want to give up joy and delight in life, which are clearly kinetic pleasures as they are the examples given by *Diogenes Laertius*.

I would also argue that "gladness of mind at the remembrance of past conversations" as cited by Epicurus as more important to him than pain on his last day, constitutes a kinetic pleasure, and that citation indicates that Epicurus himself did not value "*katastematic*" over "kinetic"

pleasure.

Quote

And when near his end he wrote the following letter to Idomeneus: "On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them; but over against them all I set gladness of mind at the remembrance of our past conversations. But I would have you, as becomes your life-long attitude to me and to philosophy, watch over the children of Metrodorus." Such were the terms of his will.

Post by "DaveT" of July 30, 2025 at 6:23 PM

Cassius: Thanks. I respect your scholarly analysis and your cautions to me on the Introduction above. I have read Austin and just reviewed [Nikolsky's Abstract < https://www.academia.edu/11301216/Epicu...work_card=title >](https://www.academia.edu/11301216/Epicu...work_card=title)

But it seems to me they and most of the textual histories are far deeper than I am inclined to dig into. Records here on EpicureanFriends are satisfactory guidance from a master logician and communicator for my level.

The distinctions of types of pleasure you point out haven't concerned me that much for two reasons: most of the writers in ancient times up to the present, seem to have a motive, dare I say an ax to grind, and I usually take everything I read, including expert translations of texts supporting Epicurus as useful, with at least a small grain of salt. And secondly, my nature is to try to boil down complex thoughts to the simplest analysis I'm able to absorb so that I can structure a lifestyle I'm comfortable with.

I didn't read the section on the Introduction to the Plutarch's writing I posted above to be anything more than my discovery of an interpretation by a scholar, who among so many others was trying to make sense of Plutarch's thoughts. Since it looks to me that almost everything we attribute as Epicurus' thoughts are second hand except perhaps the few original records extent we are forced to accept those records as good faith efforts by other men who support Epicurean philosophy.

Post by "Cassius" of July 30, 2025 at 6:48 PM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Since it looks to me that almost everything we attribute as Epicurus' thoughts are second hand except perhaps the few original records extant we are forced to accept those records as good faith efforts by other men who support Epicurean philosophy.

That's a large part of the problem. Plutarch and Cicero are the ones who play up this alleged competition between types of pleasure, and they are not doing so because they are friends of Epicurus. When Diogenes Laertius mentions that Epicurus noted the two types, he says Epicurus valued BOTH, and he does not place them in conflict or competition with each other.

It is a large part of [Nikolsky's](#) (and others') argument that we do NOT see this alleged= in types accorded significance in those who are supporters of Epicurus. Even Torquatus, who can only speak words Cicero allows him to say, talk as if pleasure is a wide but unified concept where no conflict between types exist.

I am glad that this does not cause you a problem, but as also referenced in our discussion this past Sunday, a significant part of my efforts are to be sure that it does not cause any more problem to others than absolutely necessary.

And unfortunately, as [Nikolsky](#) observes, almost every standard treatment of Epicurus in the outside world acts as if the most important thing to know about Epicurean pleasure is that "*katastematic* pleasure" is the *real* goal of Epicurean philosophy.