

Welcome Philosofer123!

Post by "Cassius" of May 1, 2019 at 6:46 PM

Welcome [philosofer123](#) ! When you get a chance please introduce yourself and tell us about your background in Epicurus!

Post by "philosofer123" of May 1, 2019 at 10:09 PM

By way of introduction, I am a 46-year-old retiree living in Southern California with my wife and 11-year-old son. I began reading philosophy in earnest in 2006. I was exposed to Epicureanism soon thereafter, reading *Epicurean Ethics* by Peter Preuss, which became one of my favorite books of all time. By 2008-2009, I found myself gravitating toward certain philosophical positions, and I wrote the first draft of my "philosophy of life" in early 2010. Since that time, I have been refining the document (which may be found at <http://philosofer123.wordpress.com>) and doing my best to live according to it. Living my philosophy has been very personally beneficial, and I consider myself to be a happy person. My philosophy is heavily influenced by Epicureanism, but also by other traditions such as Stoicism and Buddhism, as well as by modern philosophical arguments.

Post by "Cassius" of May 2, 2019 at 6:54 AM

Wow retired at 46 - that's great!

I have not read (or even heard of) the Preuss book. I see in its blurb on Amazon it states:

"the argument focuses on Epicurus' understanding of the nature of pleasure, and pain and on the distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure."

Sounds like this is an example of how important it is whose views of Epicurean philosophy you read.

Based on DeWitt, Gosling & Taylor, [Nikolsky](#), and others, I would argue that major emphasis on a "distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure" is not Epicurean at all, nor did

Epicurus consider it to be an important distinction. I continue to observe that emphasis on that is a good indicator that someone will end up with a Stoicized version of Epicurus that in my view turns the philosophy upside down.

By no means do I expect everyone to agree with me on that, but I know that not everyone has even been exposed to this contrary argument, since the that position (the Preuss position, apparently) is what is primarily taught in all academic and internet discussion of Epicurus.

In my view the way to research the contrary argument, and to see how damaging the emphasis on kinetic-katastematic distinction can be, would probably be to start with [Nikolsky's Epicurus on Pleasure](#) (which argues that this was a later viewpoint well after Epicurus), followed by the chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure"](#) (on which [Nikolsky](#) says he got his original inspiration). I would add to this the Wentham article ([Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure](#)). But likely none of this would even be considered of intense interest to someone who got his start with the [DeWitt book on Epicurus](#), which hardly mentions those categories except to point out how - even if one considers the categories relevant - that Epicurean philosophy embraces both.

Post by “Martin” of May 2, 2019 at 4:10 PM

Welcome filosofer123!

Post by “filosofer123” of May 2, 2019 at 4:39 PM

[Cassius](#), how do you interpret the following passage from [Epicurus' Letter to Menoeceus](#)?:

"So when we say that pleasure is the goal we do not mean the pleasures of the profligate or the pleasures of consumption, as some believe, either from ignorance and disagreement or from deliberate misinterpretation, but rather the lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul."

Is this not a description of katastematic pleasure, and an attempt to distinguish it from kinetic pleasure? And if so, does it not show that katastematic pleasure is of paramount importance in Epicurean ethics?

Post by "Cassius" of May 3, 2019 at 7:00 AM

The short answer to the question is "No." That passage is not a description of "katastematic pleasure," whatever that is, because that term is not used by Epicurus. It is a combination of two things (1) the core position that because pleasure is the goal, we should not choose pleasures which bring more pain than they are worth, and (2) the core position that since all human experience is either pleasure or pain, the most desirable human experience is that which is "crammed full of pleasures" and from which all pains have thereby been crowded out and are absent.

The long answer is that given the monolithic acceptance of the Stoic-lite viewpoint in the literature of the last several hundred years, you aren't likely to accept the short answer unless you dig into the details presented in the articles I mention. Those articles cite the background in which the letter to Menoeceus was written, and the subsequent philosophic wars in which the K/K distinction was pushed.

The key aspect of the background of the letter was the philosophic war with Platonists as to whether Pleasure has a limit of quantity, found in [Philebus](#), and Epicurus' response that the limit of pleasure is when experience is filled with nothing but pleasures. That is the meaning of PD3 as well, where the context of **quantity** is stated explicitly.

The key aspect of the subsequent philosophic war where the K/K distinction was considered important is traced by [Nikolsky](#) in his article where he cites the Division of Carneades for pushing this viewpoint. And you will see that the same "ordinary pleasures" conclusion is reached when you read the much more detailed treatment by Gosling and Taylor in *The Greeks on Pleasure*.

In addition, there is no evidence that Epicurus himself used the K/K distinction. The only time it is referenced in the bio of Diogenes Laertius (written hundreds of years after Epicurus) DL states that Epicurus endorsed *both* types. And many references in the other surviving texts show that Epicurean theory turns on the embrace of the experience of pleasure as ordinary people interpret it, not in setting up a new term ("katastematic" or "absence of pain") as some kind of mysterious new definition of pleasure as the goal of life. The bottom line is that Epicurus taught pleasure as we ordinarily understand it, including all forms of bodily and mental pleasures. If it is pleasure, it feels like pleasure, and anything which feels like pleasure is a part of the ordinary analysis of all experience being either pleasurable or painful.

I have collected the references in support of this analysis here: <https://newepicurean.com/foundations-2/...pleasure-model/>

I grant you that the position I am arguing is not the mainstream viewpoint. But it is also not something that I dreamed up myself, and it is supported by the authorities that I collect at the link above. As cited at my link, to research this issue, start with [Boris Nikolsky's "Epicurus on](#)

[Pleasure,](#)" which argues that the katastematic issue was not introduced by Epicurus and reflects a later Stoic-influenced viewpoint. Next, read the chapters on Epicurus in [Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure,"](#) from which [Nikolsky](#) got the inspiration for his article. Add to that the Wentham article ["Cicero's Interpretation of Katastematic Pleasure,"](#) which highlights how emphasis on katastematic pleasure contradicts other core aspects of Epicurean philosophy.

I'll close this post with two clearly-documented references that I believe to be totally irreconcilable with any idea that Epicurus pushed "absence of pain" as anything other than a statement of quantity. The statement of quantity is itself critically important as a refutation of the "no limit" argument, but it is not a description of the pleasures being experienced in the best life:

It is observed too that in his treatise On the Ethical End he [Epicurus] writes in these terms:

"I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, of sex, of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form."

- Diogenes Laertius, Book X

"He {Publius Clodius} praised those most who are said to be above all others the teachers and eulogists of pleasure {the Epicureans}. ... He added that these same men were quite right in saying that the wise do everything for their own interests; that no sane man should engage in public affairs; that nothing was preferable to a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures.

- Cicero, In Defense of Publius Sestius 10.23