

Modern Neuroscience And The Katastematic / Kinetic Debate

Post by “Godfrey” of July 2, 2023 at 6:18 PM

[Don](#) I've added those articles to my reading list as well 🙄

In the meantime, here's my latest line of thinking. It's rather stream-of-consciousness, but at least it's a starting point. I've come to think of the natural and unnecessary (extravagant... how about "mahvelous"?) desires as the "sweet spot", the place where we do most our personal ethical work. We try to set up our lives so that the natural and necessary ones are for the most part taken care of (stable?). We root out our toxic desires. This leaves us in what we might loosely call a katastematic state with regard to both the natural/necessary and toxic desires.

The reason that I bring this up is to suggest that katastematic pleasures may be the "sweet spot" for working with our pleasures. (As I said, I'm figuring this out as I write...) Take hunger as an example:

- I'm hungry (a state of pain)
- I eat (a kinetic pleasure leading to a change of state).
- I'm nourished (a state of pleasure)

How do I add to my state of pleasure regarding hunger? Eating nourishing food, and eating food that doesn't spike my blood sugar are two ways: they each increase the duration of my state of nourishment. If I'm well nourished, then every now and then I can enjoy an extravagant meal without causing much disruption to my state of nourishment. But every few hours I'll be hungry again. That gives me regular opportunities to make choices and avoidances that will increase my overall pleasure.

Suppose I'm terrified of dying and going to hell.

- I'm terrified (a state of pain)
- I study Epicurus (a kinetic pleasure leading to a change of state)
- I'm no longer terrified (a state of pleasure)

This pleasurable state may last the rest of my life, or I may need to periodically study and refresh my understanding of why I shouldn't be terrified.

Both of the above states of pleasure are stable, but their duration varies. If we treat this state as a "sweet spot" to work with, we would search out various fears and desires that we experience. Then we would determine how best to work with each one so as to spend the

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greatest amount of time in a stable state of pleasure regarding each particular fear or desire. Further, we might begin with the ones that cause us the most distress. We would try to make wise choices regarding acting on each fear or desire, so that we maximize the resulting state of pleasure. Thought of in this way, katastematic pleasures serve as the major guide to well-being. Kinetic pleasures are then both a means to that end and a way to add variety to our pleasures, depending on the circumstances in which they're chosen. It seems to me that this presents kinetic and katastematic pleasures as *functional* parts of a unified system for maximizing pleasure, which after all is what Epicurus was attempting to create. This is unlike the Cyrenaic system, which only accepts kinetic pleasures and therefore lacks the sophistication that Epicurus brought to living a life of well-being.