

Modern Neuroscience And The Katastematic / Kinetic Debate

Post by “Don” of July 4, 2023 at 12:10 AM

I've been giving this ocean metaphor more thought, and I'd like to share a refinement that [Godfrey](#) offered this evening at our happy hour. I hope he doesn't mind my posting. I think it's a brilliant modification.

So, my issue of seeing katastematic pleasures as the ocean and kinetic pleasure as the waves was the idea of seeing waves as disturbances. There is a tradition of comparing ataraxia (a quintessential katastematic pleasure) to sailing on calm seas. Waves, to me, signified disturbance, turbulence, etc. Not something to take pleasure in.

Enter [Godfrey](#) 😊 ...He offered that if the ocean is katastematic pleasure, think of the waves as surfers do. Surfers seek out waves, large and small. They can ride them for a long time, sometimes they wipe out. To me, even the wipe outs are a valuable metaphor. Maybe those are the pleasures that aren't necessarily choiceworthy by everyone?? But, in any case, waves CAN be pleasurable. Thanks, [Godfrey](#) !!

So, I'm trying to not become completely enamored of the ocean/wave metaphor...but I'm liking this. As you've seen, I've left out Cicero's "Torquatus" material so far. I'm still not convinced Cicero is a reliable narrator, but supposedly Cicero requested Atticus to get Phaedrus's Epicurean text "On the Gods" when Cicero was writing his "On the Nature of the Gods." But what happens if we take this ocean/waves metaphor and look at what "Torquatus" has to say. I'm not going to be exhaustive, but let's take a look...

[Quote from Cicero, On Ends, 1.11](#)

And therefore Epicurus would not admit that there was any intermediate state between pleasure and pain; for he insisted that that very state which seems to some people the intermediate one, when a man is free from every sort of pain, is not only pleasure, but the highest sort of pleasure. For whoever feels how he is affected must inevitably be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. But Epicurus thinks that the highest pleasure consists in an absence of all pains; so that pleasure may afterwards be varied, and may be of different kinds, but cannot be increased or amplified.

From this, we can see:

- Epicurus would not admit that there was any intermediate state between pleasure and pain

- he insisted that that very state... when a man is free from every sort of pain, is not only pleasure, but the highest sort of pleasure.
- the highest pleasure consists in an absence of all pains
- pleasure may afterwards be varied
 - may be of different kinds, but cannot be increased or amplified.

If we examine this, we find a "state" (let's say "condition") which would be katastematic pleasure.

"That very state (condition)" is "free from every sort of pain." Every sort of pain? Would that be both freedom from mental pain (ataraxia?) and physical pain (aponia?)? That's how I could read it.

Pleasures that are varied then could be the kinetic pleasure which are of different kinds and varied, BUT the background condition of katastematic pleasure - the background pleasure - cannot be increased or amplified. Once erroneous view are eradicated, they can't grow back. Correct views once established cannot be increased or amplified.

Quote

it is inevitable that there must be in a man who is in this condition a firmness of mind which fears neither death nor pain

There's that "condition" with "firmness of mind"... sounds katastematic.

I'll leave it there for now, but there are ways to interpret Cicero's "Torquatus" material as this katastematic background/foundation ocean of pleasure punctuated by waves of kinetic pleasure without too many gymnastics.

Fascinating stuff!