


Why Minimizing All Desire Is Incorrect (And What To Do Instead)


Post by “Pacatus” of December 4, 2024 at 1:03 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I hope this shows that Epicureans are actually embracing many desires by fulfilling desires, and that we need not fear the feeling of desire, but instead turn towards the ones that nature gives us with joy.

Well said – and bears repeating! Thank you. 

You mentioned [PD08](#): “***No pleasure is a bad thing in itself***”; but the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures.” [Also VS50]

That also means, to me, that no desire is a bad thing *in itself*. Desire is what awakens and guides the pursuit of pleasure (from your Torquatus quote: “*pleasure is matter for desire*”). It’s not the desires that are a problem, but – *sometimes* – how we act, or refrain from acting, in their pursuit; and the consequences of their fulfillment. That is the guardrail exception – not the rule. (As you once said so succinctly: “There are no rules, only choices.” My sage therapist, when I was going through a hard time, said much the same thing. I have not forgotten your reminder! )

People who gravitate toward an “ascetic Epicureanism” often cite Epicurus’ criticism of profligacy in the Letter to Menoceus: “ ... When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind.

“For it is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit.” [131, in part, and 132]

But, I would read that as a caution that needs to be seen through the lens of (contextualized by) [PD10](#): “***If*** the things that produce the pleasures of profligates *could* dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), [***then***] we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.” [My emphasis and brackets]

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4175-why-minimizing-all-desire-is-incorrect-and-what-to-do-instead/?postID=33215#post33215>

Epicurus' breakdown of desires into (1) natural and necessary, (2) natural and unnecessary and (3) unnatural is a wise guide to healthful and beneficial choosing. But ***"No pleasure is a bad thing in itself."***