

Why pursue unnecessary desires?

Post by "Cassius" of May 5, 2025 at 6:35 AM

So Epicurus would tell everyone to buy a single black jacket when they reach 18 or full height, and never buy another one until that one falls into rags? As a matter of principle, why would anyone using the NNUU formula do more than that?

Because you like different colors? That's unnecessary.

Because you like different styles? That's unnecessary.

Because you don't like to look at worn threadbare clothing? That's unnecessary.

And on and on...

How does the classification itself lead to any other result?

My point is that the classification itself standing alone is useless or even harmful, just like "pleasure is the absence of pain" can be destructive, without other overriding information.

In one case, the additional information that is needed is that there are only two feelings, which means that the absence of one is the presence of the other. In this case, the additional information is that all pleasure is desirable and worthy of choice if it brings more pleasure than pain, therefore you will never think of limiting yourself only to desires that are "necessary and natural," especially since you also know that there are no supernatural gods or ideal forms that require everyone to follow a prescribed list of what is "natural" or "necessary" for them.

New jackets in many (but not all) cases are going to bring more pleasure than pain. Thus the "principle of the classification" (as Torquatus says) explains that "unnatural and unnecessary" can be expected to cost more in pain.

I'd say the classification system was not intended to be a hard and fast rule philosophical rule, but a tool, almost like a price predictor or cost estimator - a way of predicting how much pain to expect from an action so that you can then decide if the pleasure will be worth it. The future isn't certain and we disdain fortune-telling, but that doesn't mean we don't need a practical way of predicting what will happen from pursuing alternative choices.

And as a rule of prediction, it works very well - "nothing could be more useful...." per Torquatus. So it's very productive to use the classification system to predict the costs of your pleasures. But the overriding rule is to seek out more pleasure than pain using the cost estimator, not to use the cost estimator as an end in itself.

So I would also analogize this classification system to "virtue," which is necessary to consider in order to obtain happiness, but which is not the end in itself. Both "virtue" and this classification

system can be very destructive if taken out of context and put into the place of the end rather than of the means.