

Epicurean Attitudes Toward Emotion

Post by "Cassius" of March 10, 2020 at 11:30 AM

¹⁶ I should admit at once that this suggestion runs counter to the only ancient source that interprets the classification of desires in terms of degrees of specificity, the scholion to Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1118b8, quoted in Usener 456. The scholiast gives as examples of a necessary desire, the desires for food and for clothing; as an example of a natural and not necessary desire, the desire for sex; and as an example of desires that are neither, "the desire for such-and-such (τοιῶνδε) food or such-and-such (τοιᾶσδε) clothing or such-and-such (τοιῶνδε) sex." We have, however, no reason to give this scholion authority; and this explanation quite fails to accommodate KD 30, with its clear implication that a desire can be either natural and not necessary, or empty (on the scholiast's view it would be both generic and specific). The scholion also makes the necessary/not necessary distinction artificial; we have as plausible a need for sex as for clothing. One can defend the view that all natural desires are unspecific (as Martha Nussbaum does), on the grounds that empty beliefs come in only when the agent wants one thing or kind of thing rather than

I find all efforts to come up with discrete lists of "natural" and "necessary" to be artificial and unlikely to be something that Epicurus himself encouraged. That observation is behind my resistance to thinking that there is any kind of discrete / absolute / bright line "Epicurean measure of wealth" or Epicurean measure of anything else, other than in the most generic form of saying that it is the most pleasure and the least pain, but even that is clearly totally contextual to the individual involved.

So I think Julia Annas is right here that there is **no reason to give this scholion authority**, and every reason to question his judgment in adding this to the text.

Edit: I think where Epicurus was going with this is stated by Torquatus: the principle of the classification is that some pleasures are easier to get and some require more effort. That's the kind of thing you need to think about when you evaluate which path to choose in any course of conduct. He's giving practical advice on things to consider, not drawing bright lines.