

# On "Desires" And Their Relationship To Pleasure

Post by "Don" of September 11, 2020 at 11:10 PM

Here's my perspective, as of this writing. Let's call it a work in progress:

The canonical faculties are Sensations, Mental Perceptions (or Prolepses), and Feelings (of Pleasure/Pain).

I want to say I read this elsewhere on the forum so bear with me:

We sense something in the real world either through our physical senses (smelling, tasting, touching, etc.) OR our mental Perceptions (thinking) THEN this elicits a reaction of pleasure or pain.

So, in light of this, I think a desire is a mental perception to which we have a pleasurable or painful reaction. But what are desires like? Or made of?

One selection where Epicurus talks about desires is:

Quote

...keep in mind that some desires are natural whereas others are groundless; that among the natural desires some are natural and necessary whereas others are merely natural; and that among the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, some for physical health, and some for life itself.

Necessary desires are required for different reasons. And also...

Quote

PD 11: If we had never been molested by alarms at celestial and atmospheric phenomena, nor by the misgiving that death somehow affects us, nor by neglect of the proper limits of pains and desires, we should have had no need to study natural science.

Here we are told we need to learn the limits of both pains and desires. I would say that pains are limited to short if severe, bearable if long; desires are limited to natural and necessary. Not that we can limit them, but that we need to learn the limits of them. But Epicurus also wrote:

Quote

VS 135. If you want to be wealthy, Pythocles, don't increase your riches but reduce your desires.

Seneca also uses this. In light of the last quote, it would seem to mean "be aware of the limits of his desires" although the original just says "take away desires." Concentrate on natural and necessary ones.

So, we've seen desires paired with pains. Now this:

Quote

VS 203. Insofar as you forget nature, you will find yourself in trouble and create for yourself endless fears and desires.

From this, we have to ask ourselves what are the similarities between fears and desires? Among pains, fears, desires? Can fears be groundless or empty like desires? Or natural? Or have limits? What allowed the comparison? Could fears be the mirror of desires? One attracts, the other repels? Could these be the mental parallel of the feelings of pain and pleasure? Fear and desire?

Quote

485. Unhappiness (kakodaimonia - the opposite of eudaimonia) is caused by fears, or by endless and empty desires; but he who is able to rein these in creates for himself a blissful understanding.

So, kakodaimonia can be caused both by fears and desires... So there is a common effect those two can have. So fear and desire, but not any desires - only endless, empty ones. And here it says one can "rein in" both fears and endless, empty desires. What does it mean to "rein" them in? Does that again refer to understanding limits or something else? It would seem to follow that eudaimonia/happiness can be caused by the opposite of fears (?) and limited (not endless) desires based on true Philosophy (not empty ones). And happiness is part of a pleasurable life.

A common thread seems to be limits. Pains are limited. Desires are limited. But fears and desires can be unlimited... But that's not a positive thing. Are some fears justified or based in true perceptions and sensations? And we know Epicurus talks about the limits of pleasure. Is Epicurean philosophy at its root understanding all natural limits? That wouldn't be a goal but a means to maximizing pleasure.

My reason for laying all this out is to see what desires are akin to in Epicurus's writings to see what similarities we can find and how they relate to the Canon, pleasure, and other parts of the philosophy.