

Order of Natural & Necessary Desires in Menoecus

Post by “Pacatus” of December 24, 2024 at 3:04 PM

“And of the natural ones [i.e., desires], on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for *eudaimonia*; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself.” *Letter to Menoikeus*, 127; Don Boozar translation. [<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/filebase/download/97/>]

On the one hand, it is clear here that “necessary” does not mean strictly required for survival, but for *eudaimonia* (the proper translation of which is oft-argued – e.g. well-being / the feeling of well-being / happiness / a well and happy life ...).

With that said, I find the order here interesting: one might normally think that “for life itself”, being the most basic, would be the first one to consider in an ascending order (viz. [Don](#) ‘s reference in his notes to Maslow’s hierarchy). But the first one brought to mind by Epicurus is *eudaimonia*; then a body free from disturbance; and only then “life itself.”

I suspect this is not accidental, Epicurus being a careful writer. Thoughts?

[Note: I skimmed the other thread here, and didn't see anything on this particular -- overly pedantic? -- question.]

Peter St. Andre translation, for comparison:

“ ... among the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, some for physical health, and some for life itself.” With this note, re “physical health”: “[5] Literally the Greek text says ‘to keep the body untroubled’ (in fact ‘for the untroubledness of the body’), which might mean keeping the body healthy or perhaps even relaxed or stress-free.”

[Letter to Menoikos, by Epicurus](#)

BTW: Wishing a well and happy holiday season to all! 😊

Post by “kochiekoch” of December 25, 2024 at 3:49 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

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Yeah, that's interesting, isn't it?

Menoikeis is INVERTING Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs. Rather than saying that the physiological needs are first, Menoikeis is saying that wisdom, confidence and friends are the most important. Safety and the basic physiological needs will follow as they are easy to obtain in Epicurean thinking once a degree of wisdom is achieved.

[Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs2 - Maslow's hierarchy of needs - Wikipedia](#)

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

“And of the natural ones [i.e., desires], on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself.” Letter to Menoikeus, 127; Don Boozar translation. [<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/filebase/download/97/>]

Post by “Don” of December 25, 2024 at 4:54 PM

Chiming in...

While the "then's" could be taken as hierarchical, they could also just be identifying three co-equal kinds of desires: for eudaimonia, for freedom of disturbance for the body, and for life.

The life one is interesting, because I could also take the "natural" desires as a desire for things like food, shelter, etc.

For those who don't want to go to the trouble of downloading my paper, here is the pertinent section. And all of this is open to further discussion:

127g. καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον·

"And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessities; on the other hand, the natural ones only."

ἀναγκαῖαι "necessary, essential; (if a plural noun as here) necessities"

127h. τῶν δ' ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι,

"then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, there are those necessary for eudaimonia;

Those necessary for eudaimonia are open to interpretation but must be based on Epicurus's philosophy.

127i. αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν.

ἀοχλησία "freedom from disturbance"

σώματος genitive singular of σῶμα

σῶμα "the body; one's material body or existence"

"then, those [necessary] for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those [necessary] for life itself."

There are some translations that interpret αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν to mean only things like clothing and shelter - those things that provide "freedom from disturbance" for the body, that is for one's physical existence. That isn't literally what is written so that is simply one interpretation. Those kinds of things - clothing and shelter - would seem to fall under the final category of those necessary for life. So, this category should catch those between eudaimonia and those necessary for life. This is an interesting category.

I would contend that those "necessary for life itself" are those essentials at the base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: food, water, shelter, sleep, air, etc. Again, clothing and shelter would seem to fall into this category.

Post by "Pacatus" of December 28, 2024 at 6:11 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

While the "then's" could be taken as hierarchical, they could also just be identifying three co-equal kinds of desires: for eudaimonia, for freedom of disturbance for the body, and for life.

That seems reasonable. But still: is there a hierarchy of necessary desires? The Stoics would, e.g., dismiss those necessary for survival (let alone bodily comfort), in favor of their emphasis on virtue as the only thing necessary for eudaimonia (although they did allow for “preferred indifferents”). But if I am not first able to satisfy those desires necessary for survival, how am I to pursue [further] pleasure?

[Quote from Don](#)

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For sure. For example, while some minimal amount of clothing and shelter may be necessary for survival (Maslow’s “base”), that may not be sufficient for “freedom from disturbance for the body” - i.e., some minimal comfort? (Very much a question mark there.)