

What Is An Example of a Natural But Not Necessary Desire?

Post by "Titus" of March 13, 2021 at 8:51 PM

I have been interested in the classification of desires by Epicurus from my very beginning in reading on Epicureanism. Mainly perhaps his distinction is presented very prominently in the Letter to Menoeceus and it also catches attraction due to Epicurus' various sayings concerning needs and desires. I think the question how to handle one's life is of great importance. It has meaning that Epicurus addresses these questions. Even Norman DeWitt mentions Epicurus' classification (St. Paul and Epicurus) as of being important and widely known in the ancient world (perhaps of the quotation in Cicero?).

Personally, I refer to the classification of desires rather as a "focus on" distinction than an enumeration of "do's and don'ts". There is no simple list which leads to a simple living of happiness (I already know the critique on understanding Epicurus as a yogi master, sitting in the garden meditating on why there are holes in his piece of cheese 😊). We just can approach more and more closely as we ask and train ourselves on this field practically.

I would like to summarize my personal understanding:

Necessary and natural are all those desires rooted in our natural condition. Epicurus further distinguishes between simply "being", "health" and "happiness". This means we have to secure the very conditions of our "being" and to take care for our "health". I would suggest, searching for "happiness" could mean being active in philosophy, because this frees from fear and is a precondition of recognizing that everything you have to focus on is closely to your hands and easy to achieve.

Just natural but not necessary are those things, which are related to natural stimuli but do only increase the quality of a natural impulse. I do not agree with Hegel who also commented on this, saying in one sentence that Epicurus means sexual desire. In its beginning, I would suggest sexuality is rather a stimulus you also have to face necessarily. What Epicurus could really mean is how to decide and to apply in respect of the proportionality of a topic. It is like in law, you cannot say this is right and this is wrong. It always depends on.

Not natural is anything else. I think this topic addresses us to invest some thinking about, because what should not be necessary or derived from a necessity in our lives? This could be everything that is not rooted in nature and sensual feeling, but in abstract ideas. Sometimes these may be corruptions of natural stimuli, e.g. searching for fame, power and superiority. Usually, you don't need them if you have everything else achieved in the natural and necessary category rightfully.

Epicurus presents a theory grounded in our sensation and perception in respect of the physical nature of things. Nevertheless, this theory is also open to some kind of reasoned variative applicability, as I would understand the category of natural but not necessary desires. It is capable of opposing other ideas alike, e.g. the Stoic idea of abstract controlling, which lacks a real grounding.