

An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by “Don” of October 8, 2021 at 10:33 PM

Good post, [Godfrey](#) . Pulling out a couple more sentences for emphasis from the WP article:

- Desires are closely related to agency: they motivate the agent to realize them
- [Desires'] fulfillment is normally experienced as pleasurable in contrast to the negative experience of failing to do so.
- there is significant disagreement about how to define desires (This one made me laugh... Yeah, Wikipedia, no kidding!)
- Pleasure-based theories focus on the tendency of desires to cause pleasure when fulfilled. (This one does seem spot-on to how we're trying to define desires here)

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I wouldn't limit a desire to a mental concept, it could also be a physical or psychological craving.

Trying to wrap my head around your statement here. Are you referring to things like addiction? A "desire" that is more of an involuntary craving? I would categorize addiction or craving as different from a desire. A desire - in my mind - has to be voluntarily brought to mind. You have to have agency to decide to fulfill the desire or not. Yes, I'm picking up on agency from Wikipedia. A craving for an addiction takes the agency out of the picture. But.. hmm.. what about a strong desire to possess something or to be with someone? Still working all this out.

The sense I was trying to get across with the "a desire is a mental concept" is that a desire is something you can think about. In fact, the thought "I want X" (and its many permutations) is itself the desire. On the other hand, pleasure and pain are something that happens to you. You can think about the feelings of pleasure and pain after they occur.. or before they occur if you have a desire for something. Pleasure and pain are, after all, what we attempt to experience or avoid, respectively. But, in the moment, pleasure or pain just happens. You can desire lunch with a friend. You can schedule lunch with a friend. But during the lunch with a friend you experience the feeling of pleasure welling up. You can't think "Now, I will experience pleasure." That's like that beer commercial from a number of years ago where the person says, "[Commence relaxation NOW!](#)"

Quote

The commercials ... make fun of a certain Teutonic obsession with control, using various scenarios whose humor would come through whether it was a beer ad or a late-night comedy skit. In one, a blond actor struggles to get comfortable on a couch for a

relaxation session. He is wearing a stiff white shirt and tie and is listening to a compact disk titled "Das Kalm." "Commence relaxation now," an offscreen voice commands. It does not work out well. "Germans don't do laid back," the announcer intones in an unmistakable German accent. "They do beer."

(PS... with apologies to [Martin](#) btw)

It's that idea of willing something that needs to be allowed to arise naturally that I'm trying to get at. Pleasure and pain can't be willed. They can be nurtured and chosen but you can't say "Commence feeling pleasure NOW!". You can say, "I desire this experience that will result in pleasure."