

An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by "Don" of October 9, 2021 at 7:19 AM

[Cassius](#) is right and we need to return to [Kalosyni](#)'s original list that started this thread and what is meant when an Epicurean talks about pleasure. [Godfrey](#)'s mention of Maslow's hierarchy above reminded me of a post I wrote last year. Here's the applicable excerpt:

Quote

I was listening to a TED Radio Hour today about Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs... and realized it seemed VERY Epicurean: KD 29: Among desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural and unnecessary, and some are unnatural and unnecessary (arising instead from groundless opinion). The necessary desires are at the bottom. To not be hungry, etc. The need for security is the social contract Epicurus talks about. Love and friendship is next. It gets a little more fuzzy with self-esteem and self-actualization but I think the similarities remain and are worth exploring!

I wanted to emphasize again - at the risk of derailing the thread immediately - that those categories pertain to desires not pleasure. We *need* air, food, water, shelter. We can gain pleasure from those "necessary needs", but it is a necessary desire to seek air, food, water, shelter. Without wanting, seeking, and procuring adequate air, we die. Without adequate food, we die. Etc. There is an agency to making sure we have those necessary desires filled. Fulfilling those desires also gives us pleasure and removes pain. Think of swimming underwater. We can decide to stay under as long as possible, but at some point we're going to "desire" to breathe. Our heads splash through the surface and we take in a big breath of air. Ahhhhhhh!! Yeah, baby! That's the pleasure. So, my contention is that a desire need not be grand. It need not be capital-D Desire. Just like pleasure doesn't need to be capital-P Pleasure. There are things that we desire because they're necessary for living, and only the living can experience pleasure. Then pleasures can be varied. We can desire different foods, clothing, shelter, etc. A desire for those varieties are "unnecessary" in the sense that any food would do if we were starving, but there's nothing "wrong" or "bad" about deriving pleasure from fulfilling a desire for shrimp rather than bread when it comes to the "necessary" desire for food as long as it's not an undue struggle or painful process of fulfilling that variety.

Again, this was all very stream of consciousness so I'm hoping [Kalosyni](#) is at least getting pleasure from reading these digressions. 😊