

# Pleasure and Reality

Post by "Hiram" of April 11, 2019 at 3:40 PM

## [Quote from Elayne](#)

... And then the intrinsic pathways of pleasure vs the extrinsically mediated pathways-- I am tempted to call these natural vs unnatural, but that might be a stretch. There seems to me a definite difference between our pleasure systems responding to reality vs a molecule bypassing part of the intrinsic pathway to mimic our innate pleasure systems.

I don't think taking pleasure in an external object is "unnatural", but it is an interesting question whether we inherently trust intrinsic pleasure more than extrinsic pleasure (I imagine you mean here the serotonin or oxytocin that our own brains produce versus the substances that we get from things we eat, etc.)

This goes to a question that I've considered in the past, that part of what it means to be Epicureans is to train ourselves to become self-sufficient in our pleasure (which I don't think excludes external pleasures, just includes the confident expectation that we can have pleasure).

Some people may say "objective versus subjective" but this may be a way to disguise their distrust of and alienation from our neurologically-cogent, direct experience. I don't think this alienation is healthy, so the arbitrary ideal of "the objective" is suspicious to me. The key here is that Epicurean philosophy seeks to reconcile us with NATURE--all of it, our own (internal, and "subjective") nature as well as external.

Concerning the addiction question, I refer you to [principal doctrine 20](#), which includes the adage: "our nature does not shun pleasure", and sets the mind against the body in a "mind over body" logic that is applied in Epicurean therapy. The founders of Epicurean Philosophy observed that our body / our unconscious nature / our *id* (to use Freudian language for our drives) does not shun pleasure. It is the role of the mind and of reason to understand clearly the limits set by nature to our pleasures and our desires, and it is the role of philosophy and education to civilize us enough to choose and avoid wisely.

So yes, the dangers of addiction exist, but the founders seem to have been confident that, under normal circumstances, one only needs a philosophical education to avoid its dangers. So my opinion is that a person who is always high or drunk has a pathology, a disease and possibly a form of neurosis or psychological illness (and today this is the consensus among professional who treat addiction).

This reminds me of an example I've also used in the past re: our craving for candy, which is sometimes owed to the YEAST in our bellies. Gut bacteria are organisms that have their own agenda and drives, and they can sometimes hijack the neurons in our stomach to make us crave things that our bodies do not need. They are operating as a type of disease or parasite in doing this. Ultimately, our desires and cravings are bodily rooted, and unconscious, and (if they are harmful) we have to apply reason (and sometimes dietary changes and other treatments) against them.