

How to Live in Times of Upheaval: The Categories of Desire

Post by “Godfrey” of August 5, 2024 at 8:21 PM

During the political wackiness in the month of July 2024 in the United States, I was giving some thought to how an Epicurean might best apply the philosophy to their life when the world around them seems to be spinning out of control. But times of upheaval are many and varied: they can include political hostility or uncertainty, natural disasters, personal or family tragedies and many similar events. Following is a loose list of thoughts to hopefully stimulate thought and discussion on how the categories of desire can be useful, perhaps therapeutic, in confronting chaos. At the moment, I haven't got much further than compiling this list. And of course many of the questions will only apply to a particular type of upheaval, and the answers will be different for everyone and in each situation.

SYNOPSIS OF THE CATEGORIES OF DESIRE:

Natural and necessary desires: a) some for happiness; b) some for physical health; c) some for life itself

Natural and unnecessary desires: a) due to groundless opinion; b) don't bring pain if unfulfilled; c) require intense exertion

Unnatural and unnecessary desires: a) due to groundless opinion; b) don't bring pain if unfulfilled; c) hard to achieve; 4) seem to produce harm

EPICUREAN EXERCISES - CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, EACH AS A SEPARATE EXERCISE:

What type of desire is it to wish for my favorite sports team to win? How can I most fruitfully respond to this desire?

What type of desire is it to wish for my preferred political candidate or party to win? How can I most fruitfully respond to this desire?

What type of desire is it to wish for safety in the event of a natural disaster? How can I most fruitfully respond to this desire?

What type of desire is it to wish for the health of a loved one? How can I most fruitfully respond to this desire?

What type of desire is it to wish to live to the ripe old age of 150? How can I most fruitfully respond to this desire?

What type of desire is it to wish for a loved one to live to the ripe old age of 150? How can I most fruitfully respond to this desire?

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS:

How much of the upheaval is hostile to me as belonging to a particular group?

What are the potential fruits and harms of looking out for the interests and/or safety of people or communities outside of my particular "tribe?"

At what point does engagement cause harm? To whom? What kind of harm: mental, physical, economic or other?

At what point does lack of engagement cause harm? To whom? What kind of harm: mental, physical, economic or other?

At what point may the upheaval affect my safety or the safety of my loved ones?

Is it natural and necessary to assure the health, safety and well-being of those who are important to me?

How can I maintain my ataraxia while still being concerned about the health and well-being of your loved one(s)? Is this the objective of Epicurean practice?

How can I maintain a balance of pleasure over pain during a particular crisis? Is this the objective of Epicurean practice?

Is my goal to maintain ataraxia, or a balance of pleasure over pain during the particular time of upheaval, or is to survive in the most prudent manner to maintain a balance of pleasure over pain over time? Or both?

What does [PD04](#) have to say about this, if anything? *"Pain does not last continuously in the flesh; instead, the sharpest pain lasts the shortest time, a pain that exceeds bodily pleasure lasts only a few days, and diseases that last a long time involve delights that exceed their pains."* (St-Andre translation). Does this apply to mental pain as well, or does this imply that I can have a stable mental state in times of adversity?

I'm realizing that this has become fairly wide ranging.... In the event that any discussion comes of this, it might be best to manage it in various new threads which link back to this one. Anyway, that's all I've got!