

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

Post by "Cassius" of August 8, 2024 at 1:02 PM

Ok I am coming here after the [pig latin](#) discussion so I may be off on a tangent but in regard to that chart in the last post, or any chart, it seems to me the basic ground rules are:

(1) Nature give us ONLY two criteria to use for deciding what to choose and to avoid, and those criteria are pleasure and pain.

(2) I perceive that in some minds, this statement of only two criteria sounds like Epicurus was referring to "the pleasures of the moment" and "the pains of the moment." **I do \*not\* see that as a correct inference and I do not think Epicurus was saying that.** To me it is very clear that Epicurus is saying that each decision must consider *\*all\** pleasure and pain (mental and bodily) over *\*all\** periods of time (now, tomorrow, for as long as we live) and that each decision must evaluate *\*every possible\** ramification before you can conclude that the action should be taken or avoided. Of course it is not possible to do an extensive analysis every moment about every decision, and you have no guarantee that your assessment will be correct, because you cannot have total control over the future. But doing our best to make such an analysis *\*is\** essentially what we are doing by internalizing all the considerations and learning to adjust our conduct over time according to the results that our actions bring.

(3) All the discussion of "natural" and "necessary" is *\*contextual\**, and cannot be reduced to universals that apply to all people at all times and all places. Even breathing can be postponed if by holding your breath to swim out of a cave you save your life. As Torquatus said, the classification has a principle, that things which are most natural and most necessary are generally going to be the easiest to obtain, and therefore can generally be obtained with the least resulting pain, but that is ***\*\*not\*\**** a general statement that nature universally demands that you *\*only\** eat bread and drink water and live in a cave. The natural and necessary classifications can act as a general guide for those times when you don't have enough information to be confident that what you can do will be achievable. What is expected as we get smarter over time, however, is that we learn to know what is and is not possible, and at what cost of pain, so over time we move out of the cave and we start eating more than bread and drinking more than water, unless circumstances demand otherwise. And generally speaking circumstances do *\*not\** demand otherwise, and we *\*can\** do a lot better than bread and water and caves.

(4) The most important observation to make at this point in the analysis is that we frequently choose pain in order to gain more pleasure, and so the fact that an action may result in *\*some\** pain is absolutely *\*not\** a reason not to engage in it. The question is the *\*net result.\** If the

action generates more pleasure than pain, then it is justifiable to take it. Of course we frequently have lots of choices from which we can choose among, so we also have to not only compare the pleasure and pain from a single action, but we have to compare the net pleasure/pain that would result and choose from between alternatives by comparing the net amount of pleasure.

(5) As to the "emptiness" or "vanity" of some desires, it is obviously a bad idea to set your sights on achieving goals that are impossible to obtain - like living forever - because the impossible will by definition not be achievable, and you will always end up frustrated. But how do you know ahead of time whether a goal is possible or not? And exactly how long you should try to live, or exactly how much money should you should pursue, or exactly how much food should you should eat? There are no universal rules to answer these questions, so you always go back to the first and foremost point, that nature gives you only pleasure and pain by which to decide what to choose and what to avoid. You then do your very best to guide your actions by estimating -- in the long run and from the widest possible perspective - what the results of your actions are going to be in terms of net pleasure and pain. And to be clear - net pleasure and pain \*that effects you.\* It makes no sense to be concerned about pleasure and pain in the abstract, if they don't affect you, but it does make sense to consider the pleasure or pain of those around you to the extent that their reaction to your actions will have an impact on your own pleasure and pain (just as we evaluate in regard to our friends).