

Epicurean versus deceptive (“modern”) Stoic decision making

Post by “Julia” of August 11, 2024 at 1:23 PM

“What is desire?” reminds me of [how important it is to stick closely to ordinary language](#), to not redefine things but to remain as close to everyday speech as possible.

Some – in my mind very mistaken – dictionary definitions of “desire” even go so far as to say desire is something sexual. If that were the case, the entirety of Epicurean philosophy would not be applicable to children, even though its central tenet is, in part, derived from observation of toddlers and piglets. If we only go so far as to define it as “passionate longing”, then – keeping in mind the importance of sticking to ordinary everyday language – it also just doesn't make sense anymore. To prove that point by counterexample:

I am neither passionate about nor longing for death;
however, I very much do desire to eventually die, one way or another.
As I sit here, I don't have a passionate longing for a good death;
however, as I sit here, I'd say drifting off in my sleep would, someday, be desirable.

To me, this is sufficient proof that “desire” is much broader than “passionate longing” or, even worse, as “something related to sex”. (A bit besides the point, but what would an “unnatural passionate longing” even mean? That sounds very much like what I imagine is catered to in the back room of an adult video store...)

So I'll have to very much come back to my definition based on Old English with a pinch of what, to me, is just “common sense” (in the meaning of “one just knows”, obvious; ordinary, everyday language):

[Quote from Julia](#)

Would you consider it to be **well**? Then it is desirable.
Are you **willing** to do/have it? Then you desire doing/having it.

Crucially, this quasi-definition allows for things to be desired even though they are not desirable, which is a situation the word “desire” has to be able to capture; I'm not sure how this would be possible with “passionate longings”: I cannot have a passionate longing for something which I am dispassionate about. That just doesn't compute in my mind.

(Of course, none of this means that a passionate longing cannot also be a desire; that something sexual cannot also be desired. However, it is not the ordinary meaning in the context of Epicurean philosophy. Just like a car, ordinarily, would be a civilian automobile, not a street car, not a baggage car, not a cable car, not an elevator car, ... even though all of these

can, arguably, be seen as "cars" one way or another...)