

Why pursue unnecessary desires?

Post by "Cassius" of May 2, 2025 at 1:30 PM

Another answer:

Quote

If the limit of pleasure is the absence of pain (ie. 100% pleasure 0% pain), aren't unnecessary desires merely variation?

Yes the limit of pleasure is the absence of pain, and yes unnecessary desires (just like any other) are variation past the point of 100%.

But it's a key issue to remember that variation is pleasure too, and Epicurus is not saying "and variation is not desirable."

My view is that you have to keep in mind that Epicurus is making a very specific point in defining "the limit of quantity of pleasure." It is not a good idea to presume that this statement carries over to mean that "when you've reached the limit you're finished once and for all" or that "the limit of pleasure" is a description of a particular pleasure. That would be as wrong as taking "[all sensations are true](#)" to mean that every thought you have at any particular moment based on a single fleeting sight or sound is totally correct. The senses are never "true" in the sense of being "true opinions." The senses are true in being "reported *honestly* without their own opinions."

We have a lot of past discussion here that relates the limit issue to a challenge by Plato and others that pleasure has no limit, and that's in my view the main context in which this statement has the clearest meaning.

"Variation" can also mean that you just live another day to experience new pleasures, and life is desirable as Epicurus says.

Your question arises in everyone who thinks about these issues and only if a person gets past this to understanding how it makes sense does the person stay with Epicurean philosophy.

For those who are convinced that these apparent contradictions have no plausible explanation I would advise them to stop studying Epicurus and go read other philosophers for a while, rather than conclude that they should in fact adopt a goal of minimalism as a generic lifestyle. I'd say that's a tragic misunderstanding of what Epicurus is saying, but we unfortunately we see it happen all the time, especially among general audience writers who think they are brilliantly explaining Epicurus in their "one-off" philosophy article.