

Why pursue unnecessary desires?

Post by "Cassius" of May 2, 2025 at 4:15 PM

I agree with that analysis and I think that's probably why there's the separate reference to desires necessary for life and necessary for happiness.

Further, I agree with you that the natural and necessary analysis is not as clear in our texts as it should be, and it's not something I focus on. I think Torquatus gives a reasonable explanation as to why it exists, as a tool of analysis, but it strikes me as rather obvious and so not something I find that important. The getting to 100% and then the rest being variation is important for logical reasons, but to me this natural / necessary division is not as much philosophical as it is practical advice. It's good practical advice too - if you need need help to see that the harder pleasures to obtain come at higher cost.

I don't think you're missing something obvious however. This analysis is a prime tool used by the Stoics to argue that Epicurus was a minimalist, so it's a major thing to fight over. Yes it can be read to mean "you should be satisfied when you have just enough to keep you alive." But was it interpreted by Epicurus himself that way? No, so it's either not meant in that way, or Epicurus was a hypocrite. I don't think he was a hypocrite, so I think it was meant in the practical way of meaning "Watch out if you go for the more difficult pleasures in life, because that may cause more pain that it's worth. There's a lot of pleasure available in things that are easier to get, but jt's up to you to decide what's best for you. And he of all people - driven as he was - would have known that if you forgo something that you really want to do then that regret can be among the most painful.

So part of the problem also is that we don't have much elaboration on this point in the texts, but in my view we have more than enough to know how **not** to interpret this passage.