

Is All Desire Painful? How Would Epicurus Answer?

Post by "Cassius" of May 7, 2025 at 10:02 PM

This question has come up at least once or more in the past, but I cannot find the prior discussions. If I find them later I will add links to this post.

This came up tonight in our Wednesday Zoom, whether as a general rule all "desire" should be viewed as painful.

We had a close split of opinion on this, so no matter whether the answer is "Yes" or "No," we have some discussion that needs to take place. From an Epicurean perspective, I feel sure that this question has a firm answer, though at present I think I could argue either side equally. So that tells me there's work to be done on this.

The "Yes" camp argument can be summarized for now as something like: All desire indicates a wish that is unmet, and an unmet wish is painful, therefore all desire is painful.

The "No" camp argument is something like "desires can in fact be enjoyable, as on Christmas Eve for presents the next day, and it is only when I desire is in fact unmet and unmeetable that a desire is generally painful."

Also in considering the answer I would ask, "In Epicurean theory, is ANYTHING in life (even desire) always pleasurable except pleasure, or is anything always painful except pain?"