

Why pursue unnecessary desires?

Post by “Cassius” of May 7, 2025 at 10:05 PM

Cicero Book 2, Section 9:

Quote

IX. We must then discard pleasure, not only in order to follow what is right, but even to be able to talk becomingly. Can we then call that the chief good in life, which we see cannot possibly be so even in a banquet?

But how is it that this philosopher speaks of three kinds of appetites,—some natural and necessary, some natural but not necessary, and others neither natural nor necessary? In the first place, he has not made a neat division; for out of two kinds he has made three. Now this is not dividing, but breaking in pieces. If he had said that there are two kinds of appetites, natural and superfluous ones, and that the natural appetites might be also subdivided into two kinds, necessary and not necessary, he would have been all right. And those who have learnt what he despises do usually say so. For it is a vicious division to reckon a part as a genus. However, let us pass over this, for he despises elegance in arguing; he [pg 138] speaks confusedly. We must submit to this as long as his sentiments are right. I do not, however, approve, and it is as much as I can do to endure, a philosopher speaking of the necessity of setting bounds to the desires. Is it possible to set bounds to the desires? I say that they must be banished, eradicated by the roots. For what man is there in whom appetites³⁰ dwell, who can deny that he may with propriety be called appetitive? If so, he will be avaricious, though to a limited extent; and an adulterer, but only in moderation; and he will be luxurious in the same manner. Now what sort of a philosophy is that which does not bring with it the destruction of depravity, but is content with a moderate degree of vice? Although in this division I am altogether on his side as to the facts, only I wish he would express himself better. Let him call these feelings the wishes of nature; and let him keep the name of desire for other objects, so as, when speaking of avarice, of intemperance, and of the greatest vices, to be able to indict it as it were on a capital charge. However, all this is said by him with a good deal of freedom, and is often repeated; and I do not blame him, for it is becoming in so great a philosopher, and one of such a great reputation, to defend his own degrees fearlessly.

The Aulus Gellius defense of Epicurus is at the link below, but it does not concern natural and necessary desires.

[Gellius • Attic Nights — Book II](#)