

Is All Desire Painful? How Would Epicurus Answer?

Post by "Don" of May 9, 2025 at 5:11 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

whether desire is separable from pain or pleasure or both.

Desire cannot be separable from pain or pleasure because we have feelings about everything that happens to us. While we are alive, we always FEEL pleasure or pain in varying degrees. BUT is it right to say "Desire IS painful?" I'm not so sure...but...hmmm...I'm not sure.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Is desire really only a function of the mind? Isn't it often physical... maybe even primarily physical? It ultimately has to be as everything is physical, even the mind.

I agree that everything is physical, or material if you will. I'm not sure what you mean by "physical" in this sense. Do you mean you can "feel" desire in the sense that a particular desire "makes your heart ache" or desiring something so hard you become sick to your stomach wanting it?

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

not conflate desires with pleasures.

Completely, 100% agree with this!!

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

desires are not feelings and therefore not pains. Pleasure/pain is one biological function, desire is another.

My only hesitation with this wording is that we can feel pain or pleasure ABOUT a desire? But I completely agree that we need to remember the natural/necessary/etc. categorization is about desire NOT pleasure.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

So I gather that the pleasure/pain network is separate from wanting (desire), but that they are integrally intertwined. This makes sense in light of our difficulty in determining whether desire is pain. It also reinforces the idea of desires not being the same as

pleasure/pain when considered in regard to the categories of desires.

That does seem instructive, and I'd generally agree with your conclusions.

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Does the same hold for grief, sorrow, guilt, shame, fear, despair, etc?

Is happiness always pleasureable?

Interesting questions. I would say we feel pain in relation to those emotions, by definition... however, if someone is feeling the - let's say - "pain of fear" in a haunted house ride at an amusement park, are they feeling pain or pleasure? They expect to feel fear and yet they seek it out as a form of pleasure.

I would have to say that "happiness" is always pleasurable, especially if we're going to equate that with "eudaimonia": *Reflect on what brings happiness, because if you have that you have everything, but if not you will do everything to attain it.* (letter to Menoikeus) (Digression: (just realized that he's not actually saying "we will do anything to have happiness." He's saying we will do everything to have *what brings* happiness. Slightly different emphasis.)