

Desires necessary for Happiness.

Post by “wbernys” of August 2, 2026 at 8:25 PM

In the Letter to Menoceus, Epicurus says "of the necessary desires some are necessary if we are to be happy, some if the body is to be rid of uneasiness, some if we are even to live. (Hicks). Ironically, despite Happiness being the first one listed, most commentors I've seen find it the hardest to understand, while life and removing bodily unease are pretty easy to understand, what is necessary for happiness seems harder. I thought i would give my take.

My general understanding is as follows: **Desires necessary for Happiness are those which allow us to have confidence about the future, and allow us to have confidence we can live well throughout the greatest part of our life.**

With this in mind some desires i think can be thought to be necessary for Happiness are as follows.

Let's start with one generally everyone agrees on, that of Friendship

Friendship.

As the Principle Doctrines tell us.

27. Of all the means which are procured by wisdom to ensure happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends.

28. The same conviction which inspires confidence that nothing we have to fear is eternal or even of long duration, also enables us to see that even in our limited conditions of life nothing enhances our security so much as friendship.

Here Friendship, generally agreed by everyone to be among the desires necessary for happiness is thought to be necessary because it allows unparalleled security throughout our life, and ensures happiness throughout the whole of our life.

All of our friends give us the greatest security as the Principle Doctrines above tell us, and it's really the confidence that they will help us as opposed to their actual assistance as VS34 tells us "We do not so much need the help of our friends as the confidence of their help in need.

The Virtues: Wisdom, Honor, and Justice.

As PD5 tells us "It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly."

Wisdom tells us that a god presents no fear, death no evils, the good is easy to get, and the bad is easy to endure, and guides us to all the other virtues which leads to a pleasant life. Honor allows us to make friends and be at peace with our community to avoid be despised, envied, or viewed with contempt. Justice ensures we no longer need to look over our shoulder constantly fearing discovery of when enforcers may catch us and gives us a clear conscience. As Epicurus says *"For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life, and a pleasant life is inseparable from them."*

As Torquatus puts it *"Epicurus explains how the Wise Man is always happy in this way: The wise man keeps his desires within bounds; he disregards death; he has a true conception of the Divine Nature, untainted by fear; and he does not hesitate to depart from life, if that would better his condition. Thus equipped, the wise man enjoys perpetual pleasure, for there is no moment when the pleasures he experiences do not outbalance his pains. The wise man remembers the past with gratitude, grasps the present with a full realization of its pleasantness, and does not rely upon the future. The wise man looks forward to the future, but finds his true enjoyment in the present. The wise man is also entirely free from the vices that I have described, and he derives considerable pleasure from comparing his own wise existence with the life of the foolish. Moreover, any pains that the Wise Man may encounter are never so severe but that he has more cause for gladness than for sorrow."*

Confidence in our knowledge.

As [PD22](#) tells us *"We must take into account as the end all that really exists and all clear evidence of sense to which we refer our opinions; for otherwise everything will be full of uncertainty and confusion."* If we decide to veer off into other directions and reject the senses and go instead into useless speculation, there would be no hope of being able to have the confidence about certain matters which allow for a pleasant life.

Knowledge of how the world works.

This is needed to dispel mythology as PD 12 which says *"It would be impossible to banish fear on matters of the highest importance, if a person did not know the nature of the whole universe, but lived in dread of what the legends tell us. Hence without the study of nature there was no enjoyment of unmixed pleasures"*.

If we are constantly afraid of gods striking us down, with disaster or hell or other terrible punishments, we will never have true security, being no different than a criminal in terms of happiness, and all our efforts to being secured against others would be worthless as [PD13](#) tells us *"There would be no advantage in providing security against our fellow humans, so long as we were alarmed by occurrences over our heads or beneath the earth or in general by whatever happens in the boundless universe."*

Freedom through self-sufficiency.

Not in the American sense of electing your leaders, but rather in the sense of not being under the absolute control by others, and being able to operate freely of both empty desires and

enslavement to others. As Epicurus says "*Freedom is the greatest fruit of self-sufficiency.*"

Diogenes of Oenoanda further criticizes Military service and public speaking, on these lines saying "*Military service is dangerous and one is subordinate to others. Public speaking is full of agitation and nervousness as to whether one can convince. Why then do we pursue an occupation like this, which is under control of others?*" I believe this is also the biggest reason Epicurus opposed getting involved in politics unless you had to.

Security from other men.

As Diogenes says above, it is not just the subordination which makes military service bad, but also the uncertainty and danger, especially when it was done for such vain reasons as "Glory" and "Honor", when in reality, most are forgotten. Don't strive for foolish glory and destroy happiness by being in constant danger for stupidity, rather have security to enjoy your pleasures of life without fear.

Hope you enjoy!