

Regarding categories | Will to Power: a natural or un-natural desire?

Post by “shahabgh66” of August 7, 2021 at 6:02 AM

Hello to all friends,

According to Epicurus, is human's will to power considered an "un-natural" desire?

Can we say, according to Epicurus will to power (i.e. political power), fame (a desire to build a superior and iconic image for the mass which is another form of human's power seeking), wealth (another form of human's power seeking) are examples of a natural but non-necessary desire or, un-natural and therefore not necessary one?

Why am I asking this: We know for the fact that it's a general attribute of humans that they seek authority, dominance, influence, a top place at any hierarchy, etc. These are all different forms of humans will to power, It's also a very basic behavior seen among kids, specially male human child (which opens another door to biology and gender studies).

Post by “Cassius” of August 7, 2021 at 6:19 AM

Are you specifically looking for an answer that ties to Nietzsche's "will to power"? If you are I think the definition of that term would need to be discussed in detail.

If you are just asking generically about power, fame, wealth, etc., My understanding would be that the issue is not that there is anything intrinsically wrong with some amount of wealth, or power, or fame, but that the error is to pursue these as ends in themselves without consideration of the question of "how much do I really need to remain safe and happy. Some degree of all those things are generally going to be necessary for sustaining control over our living conditions, and they are pleasurable in many cases, so you must first remember the premise that all pleasures are desirable because they are pleasurable. The question is always in every case a matter of whether any course of conduct should be pursued by a particular person under particular circumstances, with the test being will the pursuit in fact lead to greater pleasure or pain

I think that's the general framework and if we want to analyze Nietzsche we simply have to penetrate the density of his expressions to see how what he actually meant fits within that Epicurean paradigm

Post by “Cassius” of August 7, 2021 at 6:20 AM

And good to hear from you Shahab!

Post by “shahabgh66” of August 7, 2021 at 7:16 AM

I do my best not to tie Nietzsche with Epicurus, still it is a very delicate business to use proper terms, considering their fluid connotations over time. But let me simple down my question, the problem for me started with video clips like [this](#) , you can go directly to 12':10" to see how the narrator has categorized the desires; naming desire for power or fame unnatural and unnecessary. While, I was thinking that the derive for any kind of power (as a drive), political (in formal sense of meaning), or non-political, cannot be unnatural.

Post by “Don” of August 7, 2021 at 8:36 AM

What is unnatural, or "culturally conditioned and fruitless", is a desire for limitless power, limitless wealth, etc. We, of course, require a sense of agency to be able to make our choices and rejections. But I would urge caution when we start to make arguments for things like a desire for power being natural.

If we look at the animal kingdom, as Epicurus was wont to do, we do see some animals exerting dominance over their troop/pack, but they don't "desire" to exert power over every pack and to build empires. This is not the rule in every animal, either, so even this analogy has limits.

Post by “Cassius” of August 7, 2021 at 9:54 AM

My first and most important comment is that I think what we are seeing here is typical for a stoic (which the video producer apparently is) - he is getting caught up in logical categorizations as if there is something magical about them, and so he is from the beginning

failing to appreciate the fundamental starting point of Epicurus - that pleasure and pain are the only ultimate standards given to us by nature by which to determine what to choose and what to avoid. These categories have no intrinsic meaning in themselves other than explained by Torquatus in On Ends:

"One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural without being necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary; **the principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little, since nature's own riches, which suffice to content her, are both easily procured and limited in amount; but for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered.**"

So as Don has said the issue is not that there is anything wrong with power or fame in themselves, the issue is whether you choose to pursue them limitlessly as ends in themselves, or whether you recognize that there is a limit to keep in mind on all of them: You want that amount that leads you to maximum pleasure under your circumstances, no more and no less.

So I'll repeat myself but I think this is the central point: You cannot be a stoic and pull this classification out of context as if Plato or God blessed it as an absolute ideal. The classification is subsidiary - like everything else is - to the ultimate goal, which is pleasure. And since there is no god or no absolute standards of conduct, there is only a contextual evaluation process depending on your circumstances - and if you get caught up in the multiple meanings of "natural" and "necessary" rather than always asking "what will happen to me in terms of pleasure or pain if I make this choice" then you're going to lose sight of the true goal and get totally confused.

I would say that if Epicurus were here he might well say that this confusion of ends and means is one of the CENTRAL problems with the stoic approach, modern or ancient. Even ignoring the kinetic and katastematic reference on this chart, which I also think is misleading, it's simply impossible to come up with an absolute list of what to place in these three categories.



If it were possible to come up with an absolute list, then you'd have an absolute definition of "virtue," which is equally impossible.

Which is why I still have Elli's graphic from Diogenes of Oinoanda on the front page here. I would argue that you could put each of these three categories "natural and necessary" etc in

this graphic in the place of "virtue" and the point would be exactly the same:

A man with dark hair, wearing a white shirt, is shouting into a large, black megaphone. He has a determined and intense expression, with his mouth wide open and eyes squinted. The background is a solid, light green color.

But the issue is not, "what is the means of happiness"?
The issue is, "what is happiness"?
Or, in other words, "What is the ultimate goal of our nature"?

I say both now, and always, shouting out loudly, to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the highest end of life!

The virtues, which are turned upside down by other philosophers, who transfer the virtues from "the means" to "the end", are in no way the end in themselves! The virtues are not ends in themselves, but only the means to the end that Nature has set for us!

This we affirm to be true in the strongest possible terms, and we take it as our starting point for how men should live.

From Diogenes of Oinoanda INSCRIPTION

Elli 23/05/15

Post by "Cassius" of August 7, 2021 at 9:58 AM

I have not previously seen that video so thanks to bringing it to our attention. Looks like it is a very detailed presentation so it would probably be worth reviewing and responding to it in detail.

From the very beginning it appears you can predict exactly what is going to be presented - the ascetic version of Epicurus.

Post by “Cassius” of August 7, 2021 at 10:04 AM

Let's do extended commentary on that video in THIS thread: [Review of the "What is Epicureanism and Is Compatible with Stoicism?" video](#)