

# Kungi's Natural and Necessary Discussion

**Post by “Godfrey” of July 24, 2022 at 1:35 PM**

ADMIN NOTE: This thread was split off after Post 10 of the "Welcome Kungi" Thread [here](#). The following series of posts were originally post 11 in that thread.

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## [Quote from Cassius](#)

We need to continue to talk about how to avoid an overbroad formulation here and what issues arise with this. What exactly are "unnatural" pleasures? Should we seek none of them at all to any degree?

This is a prime example of confusing pleasures with desires. *All* pleasures are natural because pleasure/pain is the faculty of feeling. *Desires* are what need to be discussed in terms of what is natural, necessary, vain &c, not pleasures. I imagine this may sound like nitpicking but I'm increasingly convinced that it's an important point.

Limits seem to be a key factor in evaluating one's personal desires, at least in terms of desires which are naturally limiting v desires which need to be limited by the individual. But this is just one of several ways to evaluate desires, another being estimating resultant pleasures and pains.

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**Post by “Don” of July 24, 2022 at 2:26 PM**

## [Quote from Godfrey](#)

I imagine this may sound like nitpicking

Doesn't sound like nitpicking to me 😊

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**Post by “Cassius” of July 24, 2022 at 3:33 PM**

Yes I agree Godfrey it is an important point - a threshold way of getting the terminology right, because it helps clarify that all pleasures are pleasing and in that sense desirable.

But at that point the ball is still in play. Even if Pacatus had stated his comment in terms of only pursuing natural desires, we would still have essentially the same set of problems:

What exactly are these "non- natural desires" and what should be our attitude toward them? Are we to fully banish them from our lives?

This conversation moves us along toward those issues, which I think is where the deepest issues have to be resolved.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of July 24, 2022 at 5:47 PM**

To my current understanding, the "non-natural" are best described as "unlimited" desires. They vary by the person and by the situation and can change over time. They are desires which are divorced from the limit of the natural homeostatic relationship between pleasure and pain, and thus have become unlimited. Some of them involve intense, conscious effort by the person in order to consciously limit them, while others have been eliminated by the person through reasoning as to how they would affect their pleasure and pain over time.

For instance, many people can enjoy a cocktail from time to time, maybe more. There are natural consequences to overindulgence such as a hangover or regrettable behavior. These provide a natural incentive to limit one's future consumption to what, for them, is an amount which balances a maximum of pleasure with a minimum of pain. So when the desire for that one extra drink arises they can choose to act based on their previous experience and consideration. This would be a case of natural desire.

On the other hand, this same situation for an alcoholic involves unlimited desires. They face extreme difficulty in acting rationally when faced with a strong desire for a drink, because their homeostatic functioning isn't working as it naturally should. This would be a case of unlimited desire.

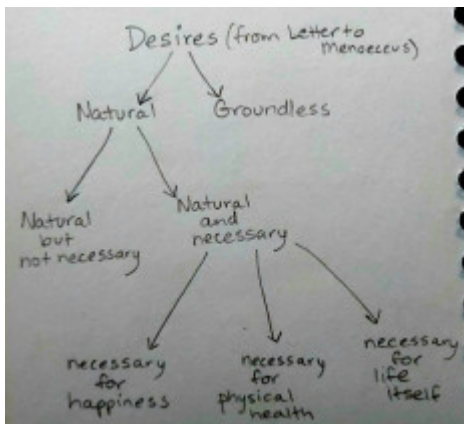
To oversimplify, these two examples have the same basic pleasures and pains involved, but for one person the desire involved is natural, for the other person it's unlimited. These might be considered physical desires.

Things like the desire for fame, fortune and power would then be mental desires. Similarly to the previous examples, one person may have a naturally limited desire for one or more of them while someone else may have unlimited desire.

As to whether some unlimited desires are to be fully banished from our lives: that, too, is up to the individual and their particular circumstances. And in some circumstances, for some people, it seems like common sense to banish a particular desire and they don't need to think about it much. Whereas for other people and/or circumstances, a desire may need to be banished with great effort. Still another case is a desire that gets temporarily banished as being or becoming unlimited, then after a time it dissipates and becomes a natural desire to be healthfully enjoyed.

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of July 24, 2022 at 6:51 PM**



It would all depend on what is considered necessary for happiness.

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**Post by “Cassius” of July 24, 2022 at 7:00 PM**

Kalosyni you are saying those are the ones mentioned?

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

They are desires which are divorced from the limit of the natural homeostatic relationship between pleasure and pain, and thus have become unlimited

Godfrey so you are saying that this is the definition of unnatural desires? And can you spell out further what you mean by "the natural homeostatic relationship between pleasure and pain?"

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of July 24, 2022 at 7:24 PM

Yes, that diagram is based on the following:

### Quote

Third, keep in mind that some desires are natural whereas others are groundless [note]; that among the natural desires some are natural and necessary whereas others are merely natural; and that among the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, some for physical health [note], and some for life itself. The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject in terms of the health of the body and the serenity of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely happy life. Our every action is done so that we will not be in pain or fear. As soon as we achieve this, the soul is released from every storm, since an animal has no other need and must seek nothing else to complete the goodness of body and soul. Thus we need pleasure only when we are in pain caused by its absence; but when we are not in pain then we have no need of pleasure.

ἀναλογιστέον δὲ ὡς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί, καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον· τῶν δὲ ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν. [128] τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἴρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστὶ τέλος. τούτου γὰρ πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μήτε ἀλγῶμεν μήτε ταρβῶμεν. ὅταν δὲ ἅπαξ τοῦτο περὶ ἡμᾶς γένηται, λύεται πᾶς ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς χειμῶν, οὐκ ἔχοντος τοῦ ζώου βαδίζειν ὡς πρὸς ἐνδέον τι καὶ ζητεῖν ἕτερον ὧ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὸν συμπληρώσεται. τότε γὰρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρεῖναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν· <ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν> οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα.

This is why we say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of a completely happy life. For we recognize it as the primary and innate good, we honor it in everything we accept or reject, and we achieve it if we judge every good thing by the standard of how that thing affects us [[note](#)]. And because this is the primary and inborn good, we do not choose every pleasure. Instead, we pass up many pleasures when we will gain more of what we need from doing so. And we consider many pains to be better than pleasures, if we experience a greater pleasure for a long time from having endured those pains. So every pleasure is a good thing because its nature is favorable to us, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen — just as every pain is a bad thing, yet not every pain is always to be shunned. It is proper to make all these decisions through measuring things side by side and looking at both the advantages and disadvantages, for sometimes we treat a good thing as bad and a bad thing as good.

[Letter to Menoikos, by Epicurus](#)

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of July 24, 2022 at 7:37 PM**

"Thus we need pleasure only when we are in pain caused by its absence; but when we are not in pain then we have no need of pleasure."

and...

"It is proper to make all these decisions through measuring things side by side and looking at both the advantages and disadvantages, for sometimes we treat a good thing as bad and a bad thing as good."

So from this, when one is aware of physical or mental pain then one treats it with a pleasure which removes the pain.

Pains which are physical: hunger, thirst, being too cold or too hot, feeling sleepy, feeling the need to stretch, walk or exercise, needing sexual release

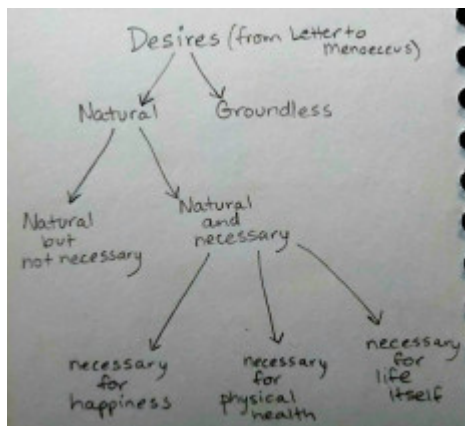
Pains of the mind: worry, fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, loneliness, boredom, etc.

(Wondering if maybe we need to move some of these posts to a new thread, since this was originally a thread for Kungi.)

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## Post by "Don" of July 24, 2022 at 8:20 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)



It would all depend on what is considered necessary for happiness.

Here's my take from my translation of the last part of section 127 of the letter to Menoikeus made into a bulleted list:

"Furthermore, ...

- on the one hand, there are the natural desires
- on the other, the 'empty, fruitless, or vain ones.'
- And of the natural ones,
  - on the one hand, are the necessary ones;
  - on the other, the ones which are only natural;
  - then, of the necessary ones:
    - on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia;

- then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body;
  - then those necessary for life itself."
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## Post by "Don" of July 24, 2022 at 10:46 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

(Wondering if maybe we need to move some of these posts to a new thread, since this was originally a thread for Kungi.)

Agree with [Kalosyni](#) on that.

Additionally, I advocate getting away from the natural and "unnatural" descriptors. There are natural desires - those arising from nature - and those that are not natural arising from fruitless, void, groundless, empty beliefs. They are κενά:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...57:entry=keno/s> That's a much better description of what they are than unnatural. Unnatural implies they are somehow not human. They are unfortunately very human desires, but they're empty of substance and can never be satiated.

This is the exact same word Epicurus uses to name the "void" in "atoms and void." He's saying that there is literally nothing there to back up the desire. The void is the absence of atoms. It is the empty space within which the atoms move.

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## Post by "Godfrey" of July 25, 2022 at 12:23 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Quote from Godfrey

They are desires which are divorced from the limit of the natural homeostatic relationship between pleasure and pain, and thus have become unlimited

Godfrey so you are saying that this is the definition of unnatural desires? And can you spell out further what you mean by "the natural homeostatic relationship between

pleasure and pain?

That's my current interpretation.

The natural homeostatic relationship between pleasure and pain is my understanding of the contemporary idea that an excess of pleasure tends to produce pain, while pleasure can bring some relief from an excess of pain.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 25, 2022 at 12:29 AM**

Here is another way of asking my continuing question on this topic:

I think we can all agree that air, food, water, shelter from the rain, and warmth in the cold, are natural and necessary desires.

I think we can all also agree that one can obtain all of these by living in a cave and never straying far except to gather firewood, kills a few deer or rabbits for food and clothing, and to gather water from a nearby stream.

What guidance does this discussion of natural and necessary desires give us as to what else to aspire for and work for beyond these few things which are natural and necessary for life? Is anyone who seeks more than that cave lifestyle a bad Epicurean?

My position has always been that the principle of the classification is as Torquatus stated, that the N. and N are easy to obtain without much or any pain, and that those which are neither N. Nor N. can be obtained only with more effort and more pain.

And my view is that nowhere has Epicurus stated that we should confine ourselves to a strict list of N or N - just that we should be prepared to ask what will happen to us and that we be prepared to accept the consequences for our choices and avoidances according to our estimate of the pleasures and pains that will come from them.

If that is all we are talking about here I see no issues at all.

If, however, someone is seeing a suggestion that the best way of life for everyone is to always pursue that course which brings the least pain, regardless of the amount of pleasure obtainable by a person who accepts some pain as the cost, then I think that would be the issue that needs to be discussed much further.

While "putting minimal pain above all " might be a perfectly legitimate choice for a person to make, since we each have our preferences and tolerances, I do not at all see Epicurus

promoting that as a general rule for everyone, just as he himself chose a course of school leadership which involved himself in regular controversies, in development of a school with legions of followers, in amassing several properties and even a number of slaves, and in prompting an eventual following of whom none I am aware were reputed in any way to be ascetic or living or promoting a "simplistic" lifestyle.

In sum i clearly see the ascetic / simplistic lifestyle being promoted as the Epicurean ideal in popular writers like OKeefe, but I am wondering if that is the implication of any of the discussion here. That's where I think the ultimate issue lies in this discussion, so that's the point I keep trying to bring out. Is the best Epicurean the one who has so limited his desires that he lives closest to the cave lifestyle? Is that the way we should read the advice to Pythocles?

Torquatus was certainly right that weighing our choices by the N and N scale helps us predict the consequences of our actions, and discussing N and N helps us flesh out those questions. But predicting the consequences is entirely different from laying out a rule as to which consequences are to be chosen, and that's where we need to be very clear as to what we think Epicurus was saying as the general rule of the analysis.

It's that final step of drawing out the observations to their ultimate conclusion that I sense this discussion so far has not yet reached.

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## Post by "Cassius" of July 25, 2022 at 1:01 AM

This is the quote from A Few Days In Athens That I cited Wednesday night and which I think applies to this discussion:

### Quote

'Tell us not that that is right which admits of evil construction; that that is virtue which leaves an open gate to vice.' This is the thrust which Zeno now makes at Epicurus; and did it hit, I grant it were a mortal one. From the flavour, we pronounce of the fruit; from the beauty and the fragrance, of the flower; and in a system of morals, or of philosophy, or of whatever else, what tends to produce good we pronounce to be good, what to produce evil, we pronounce to be evil.

The natural and necessary analysis is being used by OKeefe and others across the Internet to argue that the best Epicurean is the one who most limits his desires to only those which are "natural and necessary." Has Epicurus thrown open the gate to the construction of his philosophy that the best life is the one in which the desires are limited only to those which are

natural and necessary? If so, we can quibble about the meanings of natural and necessary all day long, but Epicurus himself has not spelled those meanings out in the letter to Menoecus, and he could not have failed to anticipate that his words would be interpreted by some to imply that he who limits his desires the most (to only the most basic natural and necessary functions of life) lives the best.

So our current situation is that just such an inference is the leading (in numerical terms) interpretation of Epicurus today. Is it correct? If so we should embrace it clearly, if not, like Lucretius said in another context, we should gird ourselves to battle to fight it and strike it down. Because like it or not this is the defining idea of Epicurus in the minds of many a academic authorities, and someone is very wrong about a very key interpretation.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 25, 2022 at 7:24 AM**

My take has been to understand Epicurus's point as "If your circumstances, for some reason, made it so that you \*had\* to live in a cave by yourself on the barest of necessities, you \*could\* find pleasure in that since you're still alive and Nature can supply your necessary needs. BUT it is NOT necessary to live this way. Living among friends, discussing and practicing philosophy, making all your choices and rejections based on practical wisdom and other sound criteria, living neither with too much frugality nor descending into profligacy... That is a pleasurable life."

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 25, 2022 at 7:53 AM**

I agree with Don's formulation. The only thing I might tweak is to bring what is implied and to explicitly refute the hyper-frugality option by saying:

"My take has been to understand Epicurus's point as "If your circumstances, for some reason, made it so that you \*had\* to live in a cave by yourself on the barest of necessities, you \*could\* find pleasure in that since you're still alive and Nature can supply your necessary needs. BUT it is NOT necessary to live this way, nor is it desirable, unless circumstances require. Living among friends, discussing and practicing philosophy, making all your choices and rejections based on practical wisdom and other sound criteria, living neither with too much frugality nor descending into profligacy... That is a pleasurable life."

Ha - I will say on my last reading that I detect some bias in listing "too much frugality" without listing the negative "descending" that is attached to profligacy" 😊

But Don is basically quoting [VS63](#) and that's where Epicurus makes plain that both are errors, and I don't see that he is favoring one error over the other: "[VS63](#). Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess."

Note: Once again I wish we had a list of alternate translations of the Vatican Says such as we do with Nate's list of PD'. There just aren't as many alternatives out there, however.

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### Post by “Don” of July 25, 2022 at 8:14 AM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Ha - I will say on my last reading that I detect some bias in listing "too much frugality" without listing the negative "descending" that is attached to profligacy" 😊

Not intentional bias.

[VS63](#) warns of choosing too much frugality.

The letter to Menoikeus clearly says that "an endless string of drinking parties and festivals" is not how Epicurus defines pleasure.

So... One is looking for pain with too much frugality or too much "sex, drugs, and rock and roll."

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### Post by “Cassius” of July 25, 2022 at 8:41 AM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

So... One is looking for pain with too much frugality or too much "sex, drugs, and rock and roll"

Ha - All things being equal in terms of the pain measurement, as implied in the hypothetical, I am pretty sure I know which option I would take!

But all humor aside that would surely seem to be a matter of personal preference and individual circumstance and it would be critical to make that point.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 25, 2022 at 8:50 AM**

Quote from Epicurus

Therefore, whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say the pleasure of those who are prodigal like those who are ignorant, those who don't agree with us, or those who believe wrongly; but we mean that which neither pains the body nor troubles the mind. [132] For it is not an endless string of drinking parties and festivals, and not taking advantage of slaves and women, nor does an extravagant table of fish and other things bring forth a sweet life but self-controlled reasoning and examining the cause of every choice and rejection and driving out the greatest number of opinions that take hold of the mind and bring confusion and trouble.

It seems to me that he's clearly stating that an "endless string" of drinking parties and those others do not fall under his definition when he says "pleasure is the goal/end/telos." He's not being coy or obtuse. When we say this, we don't mean that.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 25, 2022 at 9:00 AM**

See I read that differently. I think he's saying not saying that everyone has to avoid those things completely, but that everyone has to evaluate their circumstances and options and preferences and decide exactly how much partying and fine food is going to be what they wish to pursue - for the more they pursue, if their circumstances do not allow it - the more pain they will suffer in cost. I put key emphasis on the "endless" adjective.

That's why I see this as included: " reasoning and examining the cause of every choice and rejection and driving out the greatest number of opinions that take hold of the mind and bring confusion and trouble."

That's not a flat rejection of the activities listed, because those are the ways Epicurus has said he knows the good. Instead, he is saying to prudently deliberate how much of it to engage in considering your own resources and your own preferences and tolerances for pain.

It is not the activity itself which is inherently wrong - that would not be maintainable under the big picture of the philosophy - but the manner of engaging in it (constant / endless) as opposed to the right amount (which may be none or a lot) depending on your circumstances. And no activity is going to have the same amount of pain and pleasure in it for everyone in every circumstance - not even for the same person at different times.

Reading that quote as a flat prohibition or even a sweeping preference would create a list of absolutes that would not be consistent with [VS63](#) or more importantly with the absence of fate and supernatural gods and ideal forms - it would be handing down a list which applies to everyone, which violates the most basic view of how the universe operates.

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## Post by “Don” of July 25, 2022 at 10:20 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

See I read that differently. I think he's saying not saying that everyone has to avoid those things completely, but that everyone has to evaluate their circumstances and options and preferences and decide exactly how much partying and fine food is going to be what they wish to pursue - for the more they pursue, if their circumstances do not allow it - the more pain they will suffer in cost. I put key emphasis on the "endless" adjective.

LOL. I don't think we read it that differently in the end in light of your explanation there.

He clearly didn't forbid attendance at drinking parties. He wrote a book entitled *Symposium after all*.

I too think the emphasis is on the "endless". And it doesn't really say that in the Greek. Here are my notes from my commentary:

οὐ συνέιροντες (ou syneirontes) "not stringing together"

"not an endless string of drinking parties and festivals..."

Note that he doesn't say you can't attend drinking parties or take part in village festivals! He's saying life shouldn't be an "endless string" of them. That's going to lead to more pain than pleasure in the end.

συνείρω

only in pres. and imperf.

I. to string together, Lat. connectere, Ar., Plat.

II. to string words together, Dem., etc.: then, seemingly intr. (sub. λόγους) to speak on and on, go on without pausing, Xen.

PS. I still think this whole line of argument from him is a direct refutation of the Cyrenaics.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 25, 2022 at 12:17 PM**

Exactly -- as usual we look like we are sparring and really close in agreement.

I think these conversations are extremely helpful regardless of how they look. The recent emphasis on "desires" as the word used in some of these places is also extremely helpful.

If we keep hammering at these issues we'll be in a good place to better present a clear alternative to the "academic consensus/ Okeefe" position.

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of July 25, 2022 at 2:08 PM**

One way to think about "absence of pain" and "living in a cave" is that it's actually rather unnatural to live that way. Unless you're thinking in terms of how early humans lived, which I don't think is what Epicurus had in mind as his philosophy is intricately tied to the society in which he lived.

The feelings of pleasure and pain are an entirely natural faculty. Our goal is to live the most pleasant life, which we do by listening to our feelings and using them as a guide to action. A person who is striving for maximum frugality is at some point going to experience mental and/or physical pain. If they ignore that pain then they're doing the same thing that in other situations clearly leads to unnatural desires, in this case the unnatural desire for frugality. If a person thrives on frugality, and either experiences no pain or examines their pain and

determines that bearing that pain will lead to greater pleasure for themselves, then for them the desire for frugality could be considered natural and unnecessary.

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## Post by “reneliza” of August 1, 2022 at 12:12 PM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

One way to think about "absence of pain" and "living in a cave" is that it's actually rather unnatural to live that way. Unless you're thinking in terms of how early humans lived, which I don't think is what Epicurus had in mind as his philosophy is intricately tied to the society in which he lived.

The feelings of pleasure and pain are an entirely natural faculty. Our goal is to live the most pleasant life, which we do by listening to our feelings and using them as a guide to action. A person who is striving for maximum frugality is at some point going to experience mental and/or physical pain. If they ignore that pain then they're doing the same thing that in other situations clearly leads to unnatural desires, in this case the unnatural desire for frugality. If a person thrives on frugality, and either experiences no pain or examines their pain and determines that bearing that pain will lead to greater pleasure for themselves, then for them the desire for frugality could be considered natural and unnecessary.

Between this and Don's note that the word Epicurus uses (in Menoeceus at least) is not "unnatural" but "void" this thread quickly became one of other people making the exact points I wanted to make before I even caught up.

The only thing that has been kind of inferred in this conversation, but I haven't seen explicitly stated: it's my thought that the void/fruitless/vain desires are those that are infinite and therefore unquenchable. These are desires that are by definition impossible to satisfy, because of the lack of any limit.

This is exactly where the limit of pleasure conversation comes in. Pleasure can't be the goal itself because it is unlimited. Until Epicurus asserted that there IS a limit to pleasure, and it's the point where you have no pain in the mind or body.

What is the limit of fame? Or wealth? Power? Frugality? (Given that couponers sometimes leave the store having been paid to shop, even zero is apparently not a limit)

This means that void desires absolutely can look a lot like someone else's natural and unnecessary desires. (Or potentially even like someone else's N&N desire: the difference between the desire for a place to live where you feel safe, comfortable, and protected from the elements, and a 30,000 sf mansion which will eventually not be good enough and will need replacing or upgrading)

Someone may truly have a limit to their desire for wealth, fame, frugality - although generally I suspect these people actually view wealth or whatever other potentially limitless desire as a means to meeting some other natural desires. And in the end I wonder if that's the sort of wrong-thinking that the void desires stem from: treating the thing as an end in itself instead of only using it as a means to obtain maximum overall pleasure.

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### **Post by "Don" of August 1, 2022 at 2:03 PM**

[Quote from reneliza](#)

And in the end I wonder if that's the sort of wrong-thinking that the void desires stem from: treating the thing as an end in itself instead of only using it as a means to obtain maximum overall pleasure.



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### **Post by "Godfrey" of August 1, 2022 at 2:10 PM**

[PD07](#) and [PD10](#) address this point pretty directly.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 1, 2022 at 4:47 PM**

[Quote from reneliza](#)

The only thing that has been kind of inferred in this conversation, but I haven't seen explicitly stated: it's my thought that the void/fruitless/vain desires are those that are infinite and therefore unquenchable. These are desires that are by definition impossible to satisfy, because of the lack of any limit.

#### [Quote from reneliza](#)

This is exactly where the limit of pleasure conversation comes in. Pleasure can't be the goal itself because it is unlimited. Until Epicurus asserted that there IS a limit to pleasure, and it's the point where you have no pain in the mind or body.

I am in general agreement with the recent line of discussions about pleasures / desires that have no limit.

But I don't think we have a complete picture until we address the question of "how much" and/or "how" to pursue those pleasures / desires that are potentially unlimited.

Let's take "power" for example. That's pretty unlimited in the abstract, and the power to rule the world on its face would be very very difficult to justify as a goal. But the power to exclude burglars or murderers from your house is highly desirable. It would be very easy to start playing word games with these issues, so the questions need to be more clear, and I am not sure it is possible to get much more specific than Torquatus did when he stated "the principle of the classification" being that some categories are more difficult to obtain than others.

Once we identify the relative difficulties, I doubt we can get much more specific as to a "rule" to apply given individual differences in preferences and circumstances.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 1, 2022 at 5:13 PM**

It might be more relatable and/or useful to those of us who are not interested in power or unlimited wealth to think about the desires to live forever, to have perfect health, or some other visceral desire. By visceral, I mean something that we've reasoned out for ourselves. We've come to the intellectual conclusion that the particular desire is limitless, yet we still subtly (or not) experience it on a physical level.

Other examples might be media influenced: the desire to look a certain way, to weigh less or more. I think that a big part of the vain desires are to some extent unconscious, so only by really being aware of our feelings do we become aware of them.

What I'm thinking of are desires that we can wrestle with as individuals, as opposed to desires that are easier to discuss and resolve intellectually. Both are important, but the personal wrestling matches are how we can really dig in for a deeper understanding.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 1, 2022 at 8:48 PM**

"The desire for perfect health" is a great example Godfrey. Perfect health is unlikely for most of us, especially after a certain age. But we still want health "as close to perfect as possible."

What I am wanting to see here is a good explanation of how we can recognize that while an extreme of a good may be unobtainable, a lesser amount of that good is definitely desirable and working hard to get, and any formula we develop has to take that into account.

This is why I still am not sure I see anything in the natural and necessary categories beyond what Torquatus pointed out as the reason for it, which is a good reason (as a tool of analysis). But this is a tool that in the wrong hands is being used to bludgeon the philosophy of pleasure into submission in the modern world. At this point I am still at the point of thinking that in today's discussions (the world at large I mean) we are finding ourselves devoting more time to containing the damage it does in the wrong hands to the benefit it provides us in aiding our analysis.

Whoever Cicero got that Torquatus material from seems to me to have been pretty sharp. As he says, only an idiot (my overlay) pursues pain for the sake of pain, and people need to smarten up and examine their actions so as to predict whether a course of action will produce more pleasure or pain. The more extravagant the goal, the more likely it is that extra pain will be involved. And considering whether a goal is "natural" and "necessary" helps us predict the amount of pain likely to be encountered.

Now no doubt we can use the categories to give all sorts of examples, but in the end the examples get very particular and specific very fast, so the general rule remains something like "be prudent in the way you pursue pleasure."

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of August 1, 2022 at 9:00 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

What I am wanting to see here is a good explanation of how we can recognize that while an extreme of a good may be unobtainable, a lesser amount of that good is definitely desirable and working hard to get, and any formula we develop has to take that into account.

[Cassius](#) this doesn't give you the answer you're looking for, but there doesn't seem to be any formula other than frank speech. The line between N/N and unlimited desire, as far as I can tell, is so individual that it can only be dealt with on an individual basis, like medicine. People needing to depend on formulas might be better served by the Stoics (except that they would then lose the benefit of a coherent worldview).

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 1, 2022 at 9:45 PM**

Yes Godfrey I pretty much agree with that, but at the same time I would argue that many people are being sickened by the sloppy prescription of "natural and necessary" without a proper framework. Not here or by you, of course, but until a clear presentation of these issues is articulated I don't see that we are making the progress we need to make

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### **Post by “reneliza” of August 1, 2022 at 11:00 PM**

It doesn't feel like a problem to me. I think it probably is difficult to communicate to non-Epicureans (or the Epicurious...which now that I think of it is already a thing...) but my view is that the necessary should always be pursued and the vain should never be pursued (I mean, I hate the word "should" but in my understanding, not having the N/N is always net painful, and pursuit of the void is always net painful, so that's as close to a "should" as I'm willing to get), and - as someone has already said elsewhere on this forum - the natural/unnecessary is the only place anything gets interesting.

Whether you should pursue a N/U desire is where the hedonic calculus comes in. Will this cause some pain but provide more pleasure? Will it cause some pain, but prevent a bigger pain? Will it cause some pleasure, but prevent a bigger pleasure? (this is actually where most of the interesting bits come in for me - learning when to say no to things I love because they get in the way of things I love even more)

But I also don't think of the three categories as being three lists, like food is in one, sex is in two, wealth is in three. I think that which category a desire goes into depends on how it's approached in the moment by the individual.

I don't think that you can draw a limit, I think the limit has to be inherent in some way. You're pursuing wealth - to what end? Your end will always (eventually) be pleasure (if not, then that's a bad sign), but do you have good reason to believe that the specific pursuit of wealth will end in net pleasure? Has it worked in the past? When will it pay off? What will happen next?

I would disagree, at least for my own self, with the wisdom in pursuit of an ambiguous goal that may never pay off when there are so many strong pleasures (mostly) easily available to me. That doesn't mean I don't believe in hard work or that I never choose pain for a greater pleasure - I'm a mom and a creator - but I don't personally believe in *striving* for the mere possibility of a big payoff.

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## Post by “Don” of August 1, 2022 at 11:16 PM

I'm not sure anyone's done this yet, but I thought it might be instructive to see where the word empty "kenōs" is used in other places.

Saint-Andre translation of [PD29](#) which includes the scholia commentary

29 Among desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural and unnecessary, and some are unnatural and unnecessary (arising instead from groundless opinion).

(Epicurus regards as natural and necessary desires which bring relief from pain, as e.g. drink when we are thirsty ; while by natural and not necessary he means those which merely diversify the pleasure without removing the pain, as e.g. costly viands ; by the neither natural nor necessary he means desires for crowns and the erection of statues in one's honour.-- Scholia)

[PD30](#) also addresses empty beliefs/opinions/doctrines κενὴν δόξαν "kenēn doxan":

Hicks translation

30 Some natural desires, again, entail no pain when not gratified, though the objects are vehemently pursued. These desires also are due to groundless opinion, and when they are not got rid of, it is not because of their own nature, but because of the man's groundless opinion.

Saint-Andre translation

30 Among natural desires, those that do not bring pain when unfulfilled and that require intense exertion arise from groundless opinion; and such desires fail to be stamped out not by nature but because of the groundless opinions of humankind.

Epicurus wiki translation:

Those natural desires which create no pain when unfulfilled, though pursued with an intense effort, are also due to groundless opinion; and if they are not dispelled, it is not because of their own nature, but because of human vanity.

Nussbaum translation, p.153

Whenever, among those natural desires that do not lead to pain if they are not fulfilled, an intense eagerness (spoudē suntonos) is present, they too are the products of false belief. And it is not on account of their own nature that they are not dispelled, but in account of the human being's empty believing. (On suntonos "intense", see Nussbaum, chapter 8). Philodemus uses the word of the sort of anger the Epicurean will avoid.

[PD37](#) uses empty in a novel way, to describe "empty sounds, words, prattle" The phrase is φωναῖς κεναῖς "phōnais kenais" and yes that's where English "phone" comes from, so φωναῖς κεναῖς = empty sound, meaningless yelling, blah blah blah

Saint-Andre translation

37 Among things that are thought to be just, that which has been witnessed to bring mutual advantage among companions has the nature of justice, whether or not it is the same for everyone. But if someone legislates something whose results are not in accord with what brings mutual advantage among companions, then it does not have the nature of justice. And if what brings advantage according to justice changes, but for some time fits our basic grasp of justice, then for that time it is just, at least to the person who is not confused by empty prattle but instead looks to the facts.

The word empty is also used here for the ἀρετὰς κενὰς καὶ ματαίας "empty and trifling virtues (aretas)"

116. I summon you to sustained enjoyment and not to empty and trifling virtues, which destroy your confidence in the fruits of what you have. ἐγὼ δ' ἐφ' ἡδονὰς συνεχεῖς παρακαλῶ καὶ οὐκ ἐπ' ἀρετὰς κενὰς καὶ ματαίας καὶ παραχώδεις ἐχούσας τῶν καρπῶν ἐλπίδας.

And in Fragment 202, we get "empty beliefs/groundless opinions" κεναῖς δόξαις (kenais doxais) in juxtaposition with "following nature" so, in a way, setting up the dichotomy of natural vs empty.

Fragment 202. He who follows nature and not groundless opinions is completely self-reliant. With regard to what is enough by nature, everything he owns is a source of wealth; whereas

with regard to unlimited desires, even the greatest wealth is poverty.

ὁ οὖν τῇ φύσει παρακολουθῶν καὶ μὴ ταῖς κεναῖς δόξαις ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτάρκης· πρὸς γὰρ τὸ τῇ φύσει ἀρκοῦν πᾶσα κτήσις ἐστι πλοῦτος, πρὸς δὲ τὰς ἀορίστους ὀρέξεις καὶ ὁ μέγιστος πλοῦτός ἐστι πενία.

Same with 422 κενὰς δόξας "groundless opinions"

422. We need pleasure when in pain because of its absence; but when we are not experiencing such pain, and are perceiving stably, then there is no need for pleasure. For it is not the needs of nature which, from outside us, create harm, but desire driven by groundless opinions.

τότε χρεῖαν ἔχομεν τῆς ἡδονῆς, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρεῖναι αὐτὴν ἀλγῶμεν· ὅταν δὲ τοῦτο μὴ πάσχωμεν ἐν αἰσθήσει καθεστῶτες, τότε οὐδεμία χρεῖα τῆς ἡδονῆς· οὐ γὰρ ἡ τῆς φύσεως ἔνδεια τὴν ἀδικίαν ποιεῖ ἕξωθεν, ἀλλ' ἡ περὶ τὰς κενὰς δόξας ὄρεξις.

471. (Saint-Andre) It is rare to find a man who is poor with regard to the aims of nature and rich in groundless desires. For a fool is never satisfied with what he has, but instead is distressed about what he doesn't have. Just as those who are feverish through the evil of their sickness are always thirsty and desiring the opposite of what they should, so those whose souls are in a bad condition are always poor in everything and through their greed fall into ever-changing desires. [note] σπάνιόν γε εὐρεῖν ἄνθρωπον <πένητα> πρὸς τὸ τῆς φύσεως τέλος καὶ πλούσιον πρὸς τὰς κενὰς δόξας. οὐδεὶς γὰρ τῶν ἀφρόνων οἷς ἔχει ἀρκεῖται, μᾶλλον δὲ οἷς οὐκ ἔχει ὀδυνᾶται. ὥσπερ οὖν οἱ πυρέττοντες διὰ κακοήθειαν τῆς νόσου ἀεὶ διψῶσι καὶ τῶν ἐναντιωτάτων ἐπιθυμοῦσιν, οὕτω καὶ οἱ τὴν ψυχὴν κακῶς ἔχοντες διακειμένην πένονται πάντων ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς πολυτρόπους ἐπιθυμίας ὑπὸ λαίμαργίας ἐμπίπτουσιν.

[NOTE 471] In the second chapter of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle characterizes desires as groundless and trifling (κενὴν καὶ ματαίαν) if they are not related to or subsumed under an overarching goal of life; in this fragment and in Fragment 442, Epicurus applies the same terms to certain kinds of desires. (See also 116 above)

Fr. 485. Unhappiness (kakodaimon) is caused by fears or by endless and empty desires; but one who is able to rein these in creates for oneself a blissful understanding (logismon).

ἢ γὰρ διὰ φόβον τις κακοδαιμονεῖ ἢ δι' ἀόριστον καὶ κενὴν ἐπιθυμίαν· ἅ τις χαλιῶν δύναται τὸν μακάριον ἑαυτῷ περιποιῆσαι λογισμόν.

χαλιῶν genitive: rein, bit, something that restrains

μακάριον makarion = blissful, the same word used to describe the gods

περιποιῆσαι keep, preserve; procure, secure, achieve.

512. "I spit on the kalon and on those who wonder at it in an empty fashion -- whenever it does not produce any pleasure."

προπτύω τῷ καλῷ καὶ τοῖς κενῷς αὐτὸ θαυμάζουσιν, ὅταν μηδεμίαν ἡδονὴν σοιῆ.

That's a translation of Nussbaum's and it's much more literal (and better) than other paraphrases I've read of this Fragment. Here we see κενῷς "kenōs" empty used to describe how some people wonder at The Noble/The Beautiful τῷ καλῷ Tō Kalō(n)

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### **Post by “Don” of August 1, 2022 at 11:31 PM**

#### [Quote from reneliza](#)

I don't think that you can draw a limit, I think the limit has to be inherent in some way. You're pursuing wealth - to what end? Your end will always (eventually) be pleasure (if not, then that's a bad sign), but do you have good reason to believe that the specific pursuit of wealth will end in net pleasure? Has it worked in the past? When will it pay off? What will happen next?

I like where you're going in this paragraph! What are the ends you're working toward? That has to be answered by someone "pursuing wealth." Wealth for wealth's sake is empty. Wealth for a specific pleasure or pleasurable goal could be something different. Although it could also be problematic if it's working for wealth only to be enjoyed decades from now and not finding any pleasure now. If I've misconstrued your intentions with those lines, just let me know.

#### [Quote from reneliza](#)

I would disagree, at least for my own self, with the wisdom in pursuit of an ambiguous goal that may never pay off when there are so many strong pleasures (mostly) easily available to me. That doesn't mean I don't believe in hard work or that I never choose pain for a greater pleasure

Same here. I think you're raising some really good points here.

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### **Post by “reneliza” of August 2, 2022 at 1:26 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

### [Quote from reneliza](#)

I don't think that you can draw a limit, I think the limit has to be inherent in some way. You're pursuing wealth - to what end? Your end will always (eventually) be pleasure (if not, then that's a bad sign), but do you have good reason to believe that the specific pursuit of wealth will end in net pleasure? Has it worked in the past? When will it pay off? What will happen next?

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That's definitely where I was going with that, although it may be worth clarifying what I meant by "eventually" which was less temporal (of course sometimes payoffs are not immediate, but I agree that it can be dangerous if there's no payoff immediately, especially if the long term payoff is particularly far off or otherwise uncertain) and more just a chain of reasoning. Like a kid asking "but why?" until you get frustrated and just admit "because it feels good!" Haha

For example:

Why are you accumulating wealth? To go on a vacation. Why do you want to go on a vacation? Because I've never seen the sunset over the ocean. Why do you want to see the sunset over the ocean? Because I expect it will be beautiful. Why do you want to see something beautiful? Just for the pleasure of it!!

If the goal is defined then it has its own limits, more or less, as to how much wealth you need to accumulate and how much effort should be put forth toward this goal based on the pleasure you'll get from it. Maybe you realize that "seeing a pretty sunset" can be accomplished with much less time, expense, and effort than the original trip to the nearest west coast assumed (but maybe not, and this is where it's always personal).

Sorry the conversation has drifted into goal setting which is a major discussion topic of mine so let me know if I get distracted by my own ideas and go too far afield from what's actually supported in Epicurean doctrine. This conversation is actually very helpful for me in my work (and life)! I think it's useful to consider pleasure, desire, and goals, and how they all relate

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**Post by "Godfrey" of August 2, 2022 at 2:11 PM**

No need to apologize [reneliza](#) ! I think that we need specifics like you've posted; it helps all of us as we bounce back and forth from theory to practice. Good post!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 2, 2022 at 3:21 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Wealth for wealth's sake is empty.

I think that formulation can't be repeated often enough.

Any "X" for the sake of "X" is going to be empty, foolish, wrong-headed, or all sorts of negative words.

There is nothing in the rigorous application of Epicurean philosophy (or good reasoning in general, once a goal is defined) that is worth pursuing for the sake of itself other than pleasure.

I think that issue is probably behind a lot of the issues in formulation that we are coming up with. I think Epicurus was rigorously and ruthlessly logical on this point -- NOTHING can substitute for the ultimate goal other than "the feeling of pleasure" because that is the only guide that Nature gave us for what to choose.