

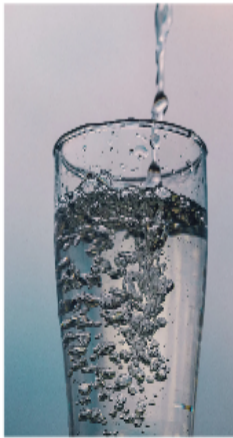
Illustrating Epicurean Ethics

Post by "Kalosyni" of January 12, 2023 at 3:19 PM

Here is a new graphic I just made. I have incorporated the terms "extravagant desires" and "corrosive desires" from the new book "Living for Pleasure" by Emily Austin.

I am hoping for feedback, do you think this is helpful? Does it need anything different or anything added?

Hedonic Calculus: Choices and Avoidances



Natural
Desires

Necessary Desires:

- ♥ Necessary for the health of the body
- ♥ Necessary for the happiness of the soul



Extravagant
Desires

Nature must be persuaded, not forced. And we will persuade nature by fulfilling the necessary desires, and the natural desires too if they cause no harm, but sharply rejecting the harmful desires.

- Vatican Saying 21



Corrosive
Desires

Post by “Todd” of January 12, 2023 at 5:04 PM

I had a difficult time figuring out what the image for corrosive desires was. (I now see they are credit cards.)

Post by “Cassius” of January 12, 2023 at 5:24 PM

Yes did Emily list examples on that one?

Post by “Don” of January 12, 2023 at 5:30 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes did Emily list examples on that one?

Unlimited desires like "you can't be too wealthy, too popular, too powerful."

Post by “Onenski” of January 17, 2023 at 7:26 PM

I think she also mentions certain forms of "love" (when people get obsessed) or sexual desires (for example, incels).

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 22, 2023 at 12:30 PM

Here is a new graphic. I removed the labels "extravagent" and "corrosive" because for me it doesn't seem correct to abstractly label anything, it must be applied with in a given condition, environment, and situation.

Hedonic Calculus: Choices and Avoidances



"No pleasure is bad in itself; but the means of paying for some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves." - PD8



"...keep in mind that some desires are natural whereas others are groundless; 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, and some for life itself."
- Letter to Menoecus



"Nature must be persuaded, not forced. And we will persuade nature by fulfilling the necessary desires, and the natural desires too if they cause no harm, but sharply rejecting the harmful desires." - VS21



Edit note: 7:51pm ET -- I'm not sure this graphic makes sense now without the labels in the very first graphic in post 1 above (especially the image of the credit cards).

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2023 at 12:33 PM

Those look like good formulations to me (since you're really quoting the doctrines). So now the question for this graphic and context shifts to whether "groundless" is appropriate.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 22, 2023 at 3:11 PM

Whether "groundless" is appropriate...

The internet definition of groundless = "not based on any good reason". And I really would want to know the original Greek word used? [Don](#) if you know?

I need to track where I read something about the view of deeming something as groundless -- after the fact or while thinking through/imagining (placing before the eyes) -- and then one sees that it 1) it causes a lot of pain and no pleasure, or 2) it is impossible to get.

For example: if a person said: "Oh how I wish I could go on a flight on Blue Origin, but it costs \$1.25 million per passenger so I can't afford to do it." So then one would then reason about how this desire is not necessary for a happy life AND then replace that desire with something easier to get. Or another (more down to earth) example: if someone has very limited finances, but says "Oh it would be so nice to go to drive to a resort town on the ocean, but hotels are so expensive these days and I need to be careful about not spending away my limited savings." -- and then sees that the basic "deeper" human desire is for exploration (or for learning, experiencing, novelty, or relaxation) then finding something else such as exploring things and going to museums in one's own city, or finding a nice park with a river or lake.

This might be the kind of thing that we need to develop clear presentations on and this could eventually be part of a daily reader/guidebook -- or an "Epicurean Basic Training".

Post by “Don” of January 22, 2023 at 3:51 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The internet definition of groundless = "not based on any good reason". And I really would want to know the original Greek word used? Don if you know?

The word usually associated with "groundless, empty, etc. desires" in translation is κενός kenos which is the exact same word Epicurus uses for "void" as in atoms and void. I always see "groundless" as having the connotation "nothing to back it up" and I'd agree with "not based on any good reason".

That said, if you're curious about a specific text, just let me know. I'd be happy to dig into it.

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2023 at 3:52 PM

I think this is also where the word "empty" gets used, right? And I find that word also not up to the task of being clear.

Post by “Don” of January 22, 2023 at 4:00 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

For example: if a person said: "Oh how I wish I could go on a flight on Blue Origin, but it costs \$1.25 million per passenger so I can't afford to do it." So then one would then reason about how this desire is not necessary for a happy life AND then replace that desire with something easier to get. Or another (more down to earth) example: if someone has very limited finances, but says "Oh it would be so nice to go to drive to a resort town on the ocean, but hotels are so expensive these days and I need to be careful about not spending away my limited savings." -- and then sees that the basic "deeper" human desire is for exploration (or for learning, experiencing, novelty, or relaxation) then finding something else such as exploring things and going to museums in one's own city, or finding a nice park with a river or lake.



Seems to dovetail nicely with:

Ask this question of every desire: what will happen to me if the object of desire is achieved, and what if not?

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2023 at 5:58 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Ask this question of every desire: what will happen to me if the object of desire is achieved, and what if not?

Yes it seems to me every time we do one of these analyses, that needs to be included, to emphasize that it is a subjective decision on what is or is not worth it to us.

Is that perhaps an echo of some of those O Henry stories (the gift?). Maybe I now interpret that differently than I used to

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 22, 2023 at 7:15 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think this is also where the word "empty" gets used, right? And I find that word also not up to the task of being clear.

Actually that is very interesting to me...because then you can ask "empty of what?"

Empty of benefit? Empty of true pleasure?

Then you can ask yourself questions like:

Does it matter if I eat hot oatmeal or cold cereal for breakfast.

Does it matter if I wear a white t-shirt or a blue t-shirt tomorrow.

Does it matter if I graduate from college or drop out to work a job -- depends on what job.

And you can ask yourself, further if it will matter 3 months or a year from now if I go to that party or not -- whether or not to procrastinate on studying for an upcoming exam.

So then it can help you determine what things you are willing to put effort into for long-term benefit and long-term security.

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2023 at 7:17 PM

Probably Don has better commentary on empty. I know we've discussed "vain and empty" before but I can't recall where we ended up. Those words just seem to me to be too ambiguous to be useful.

Post by “Onenski” of January 22, 2023 at 9:51 PM

I like Austin's characterization of corrosive desires as those that cannot be satisfied (we need infinite things and infinite time to "satisfy" them). With "corrosive", I think in the vessel analogy. Those desires are corrosive because the pleasure we get from them makes holes in our vessel of pleasure. We need more and more to fill it, but it gets worse and worse.

In any case, I think the best of her book was the examples. At least for me it's easier to classify and identify my desires. And when I notice that I have an extravagant one, I relax, because I see that I don't need it (though I'll enjoy it if I get it).

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 24, 2023 at 9:49 AM

[Quote from Onenski](#)

And when I notice that I have an extravagant one, I relax, because I see that I don't need it (though I'll enjoy it if I get it).

Yet...perhaps...this would be an evaluation after the fact of knowing that: 1) it isn't possible to get it, or 2) it will cause a great amount of pain without having any lasting benefit to long-term

well-being or security -- In which case, for my own self, might simply label as "un-necessary".

Because it almost feels like, for me the word "extravagant" is for things that I wouldn't actually choose anyway -- for example: a chocolate cupcake covered in pink icing. However, I would not label a scoop of ice cream as extravagant, since there are several ice cream parlors in my area (and instead of buying a whole half gallon from the grocery store and keeping it my freezer, then I instead choose to buy a scoop at a time, maybe twice a month.)

Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2023 at 10:38 AM

Seems like most of us are pretty comfortable with "corrosive."

The use of "extravagant" is a little more open to debate, as Emily herself says. I think in our podcast interview she indicated she liked variations of "enrich / enriching / enrichment" to indicate that they are not necessary but still desirable if available (presumably always understood to mean "available at a cost in pain that you personally find to be worth it).

Enrichment / etc is probably better, but the trick is to find something that clearly conveys that the desire is not "necessary" for a full life but that if available at a cost we find acceptable then it's a given that we would pursue it.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 24, 2023 at 1:56 PM

The objections to "extravagant" are certainly valid. On the other hand, it has kind of a delightful, libertine quality to it by making an unnecessary pleasure, be it pink icing or a bit of ice cream, into a little celebration. It can be a reminder that pleasure is the goal, and to enjoy life.