

Searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 29, 2025 at 8:11 AM

This post and the one following (by Don) have been copied over from a different thread...to start a discussion on motivation for action.

[Quote from Rolf](#)

That said, sitting on a sun lounger at a resort sipping piña coladas for the rest of my days sounds absolutely awful and would certainly not leave me content.

Letter to Menoecus:

[132] "For it is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit."

[Quote from Rolf](#)

I forget who on here said it, but this reminds me a bit of something along the lines of “the perfect/best life is for the gods”. Us mortals are always going to have to compromise like this, and while we can live like the gods for certain periods, we must expect that pains will arise.

From Diogenes Laertius, "wise man sayings" section:

"They say also that there are two ideas of happiness, complete happiness, such as belongs to a god, which admits of no increase, and the happiness which is concerned with the addition and subtraction of pleasures."

Post by “Don” of August 29, 2025 at 8:37 AM

Good quotes, [Kalosyni](#) .

It literally just hit me as I read the Menoikeus quote that:

[Quote from Letter to Menoecus](#)

[132] "For it is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which **produce** a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit."

A pleasant life is produced by sober reasoning etc. Epicurus doesn't tell Menoikeus that the sum total of a pleasant life is sober reasoning etc but that such a life is produced by those things.

From my own commentary on that section:

Rearranging the Greek into a more "English order":

οὐδ' ὅσα πολυτελῆς τράπεζα ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀλλὰ νήφων λογισμὸς φέρει τὸν ἡδὺν γεννᾷ βίον

"and nor does an extravagant table of fish and other things **bring forth** a sweet life but self-controlled reasoning [does bring forth a sweet life]."

Post by "Kalosyni" of August 29, 2025 at 10:18 AM

I just been contemplating how a subtle discontent is actually a motivating force for action. And another motivator is curiosity.

And in the Letter to Menoecus (as [Don](#) pointed out) that the sweet life is brought forth by self-controlled reasoning...as it says in the letter:

"searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance"

So these two things motivate action:

- discontent (physical pain or mental discontent/subtle fear)
- curiosity (wanting to try out a physical sensation or learn something)

Any others?

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 29, 2025 at 10:19 AM

Also, of importance is starting and maintaining good habits and ending bad habits - which does require reasoning through the advantages and disadvantages.

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 29, 2025 at 11:02 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

So these two things motivate action:

- discontent (physical pain or mental discontent/subtle fear)
- curiosity (wanting to try out a physical sensation or learn something)

Any others?

I just thought of another thing that motivates...

...the memory of something being pleasurable in the past (a natural desire to repeat pleasurable activities).

Post by “Patrikios” of August 29, 2025 at 4:19 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

So these two things motivate action:

discontent (physical pain or mental discontent/subtle fear)
curiosity (wanting to try out a physical sensation or learn something)

Any others?

[Kalosyni](#) , thanks for an interesting question!

Another source to motivate action is our perceived need to react to something received by our senses (e.g. sudden flash, loud noise, unpleasant odor, request from a friend, etc.).

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 29, 2025 at 7:00 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

Another source to motivate action is our perceived need to react to something received by our senses (e.g. sudden flash, loud noise, unpleasant odor, request from a friend, etc.).

Thank you Patrikios, I'll add those to the list (and will make revised list maybe tommorrow).

I also thought of another one: opinions of others - can work as a motivating factor - but depends on the person and the situation (fear of being shamed or kicked out of a group, or opinions of experts (such as doctors)).

Also, empty opinions (unnatural and unnecessary things).

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 2, 2025 at 1:08 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance,

I'm thinking now that there is a difference between motives behind desires, and motives for all choice and avoidance.

Desires are impulses and thoughts.

Choice and avoidance is thinking about pros and cons for a specific action.

But the motive for making choices and avoidances is motivated by understanding the need to make good decisions that lead to good outcomes.

The motive behind all desires is to move toward pleasure or to move away from pain. But the list I've been considering (here in this thread) is a big mash-up of causes of desires, desires, and motivations.