

After I Identify Pleasure As The Focus of Life, Which Pleasures Should I Pursue? (FAQ Entry Discussion)

Post by "Cassius" of October 16, 2025 at 10:27 AM

This is a first draft of an entry on this topic for the FAQ section.

I consider the heart of what needs expansion not to be the discussion of natural and necessary, but - *after we have obtained what is necessary, and once we have identified that unnatural desires have no limit and should not be pursued* - how we personally answer the question of how to decide from among the options that that are available to us.

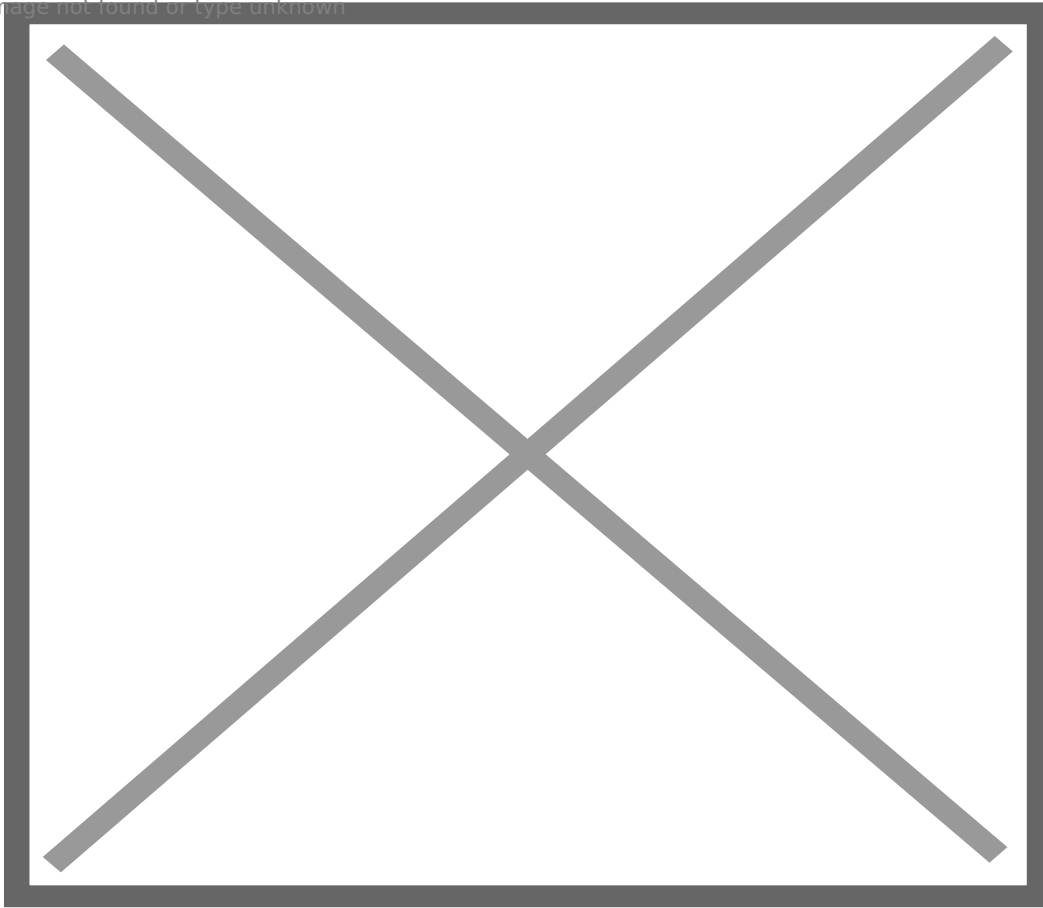
We hitting in other places and will establish elsewhere that (1) pleasure IS the guide/goal of life, and that (2) we should NOT engage in the unlimited pursuit of any desire that is otherwise fine when kept within limit (even power, fame, money).

So those are addressed here but not as the exclusive focus of the answer.

What I think needs further expansion is the discussion of what factors to consider in choosing among options AFTER we are agreed that (1) and (2) are correct starting points.

When you have a chance please look over the text here and add your comments and suggestions to this thread so we can revise the existing version over time.

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Below is the version when first posted. I will be regularly revising this as we go forward, so check the link above for the latest updates.

- 1. We will generally focus on Epicurus' division of the desires into natural and necessary classifications, but first, before anything else, we have to realize that these categories are contextual and cannot be described or implemented in absolute terms.
 - 1.1. *"And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided." Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good. "[Epicurus Letter to Menoecus 129]*

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- 2. Generally we will prioritize pursuing pleasures that are necessary for life. Therefore the first step at any particular moment of life is to confirm that you can expect your future life to be more pleasurable than painful. In almost every instance this is true, and in general it is a very small person who has more reasons for ending his life than living it. But this is not always true, as sometimes you will choose death, when the alternative of living on would be worse
 - 2.1. *"[The lofty spirit] is schooled to encounter pain by recollecting that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight ones have frequent intervals of respite; while those of medium intensity lie within our own control: we can bear them if they are endurable, or if they are not, we may serenely quit life's theater, when the play has ceased to please us."* [Torquatus in Cicero's *On Ends*, I:XV]
- 3. After confirming that it makes sense to live on, first obtain those pleasures which are necessary for continued life. These are presumably the basics of life such as air, food, water, shelter, and the like.
- 4. After obtaining the pleasures necessary for life, and after confirming that you can expect your remaining time of life to make available more pleasure than pain, consider whether the additional pleasures you choose to pursue are natural, in that they have a limit, or are unnatural, in that by their very nature you can never achieve them (such as unlimited amounts of time, fame, power, riches). This analysis allows you to forecast whether the pursuit of a pleasure is likely to lead to more pain than pleasure.
 - 4.1. The principle of the natural and necessary classification is as follows: "Nothing could be more useful or more conducive to well-being than Epicurus's doctrine as to the different classes of the desires. 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."
- 5. At this point when you know that it makes sense to continue to live, and you secure the pleasures that are necessary to life, and you identify what will likely be many options for pursuing desires that will lead to more pleasure than pain, you choose from among those options to pursue the most pleasant life according to the following considerations:
 - 5.1. Remember that the "most pleasant" does not equate either to the largest quantity or the longest time.
 - 5.1.1. *"And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant."* [Epicurus Letter to Menoeceus 126]
 - 5.2. Remember that all pleasures are not identical and interchangeable, because they do not all have the same intensity, last the same period of time, or affect the same areas of the body and mind.

