

# Welcome Max Duboff

Post by “Don” of July 4, 2026 at 12:13 AM

[Max DuBoff](#) : I want to really emphasize that I greatly appreciate your willingness to engage on these topics. This thread has grown WAY beyond a "Welcome [Max DuBoff](#)" 😊 so this has been both intellectually stimulating and fun. Thank you.

## [Quote from Max DuBoff](#)

I think it'd be more helpful to write a few paragraphs than respond to individual points.

Agreed. I like your approach. I may ramble here, but I'll try and respond to your points and see where we may differ and where it may end up we have the same interpretation but different words. Possibly?

## [Quote from Max DuBoff](#)

In On Moral Ends he assumes that the good simply is the summum bonum, i.e., what leads to blessedness. But Epicurus has an entirely different assumption: there are goods that don't contribute to blessedness, and some goods that actively impede blessedness.

So, my understanding of Cicero (On Ends, 1.42) and Aristotle (Nichomachean Ethics is that the summum bonum / telos / τᾶγαθόν is that to which all actions and decisions point. It is the final answer of asking people "But why did you do that?":

## Quote

...the Good is That at which all things aim." ~Aristotle

"...it clearly follows that actions are right and praiseworthy only as being a means to the attainment of a life of pleasure. But that which is not itself a means to anything else, but to which all else is a means, is what the Greeks term the Telos, the highest, ultimate or final Good. It must therefore be admitted that the Chief Good is to live agreeably. " ~Cicero (via the character of Torquatus)

If one keeps asking the question of someone, "Why did you do that? Why did you make that choice?" The final answer (from a psychological hedonist approach if we want to go there) is "It gave me pleasure." So, that is why pleasure is the summum bonum / telos / τᾶγαθόν. It is "That at which all things aim."

I would also agree that all pleasures are by nature good. If actions, thoughts, memories, bring pleasure, that is good by Epicurus' definition. Pleasure = good; pain = bad.

#### [Quote from Max DuBoff](#)

But Epicurus has an entirely different assumption: there are goods that don't contribute to blessedness, and some goods that actively impede blessedness. So it's important to ask, on top of what is good (i.e., pleasure), what we should actually pursue, because we can't pursue all the goods (not just because we don't have time/space, but because some goods preclude other goods).

I don't know if I agree that Epicurus has an entirely different assumption. I read Epicurus as still accepting the challenge of identifying "That at which all things aim." He identifies pleasure as "That at which all things aim." He also says that some pleasures bring more pain than pleasure in the end (ex., endless drinking bouts, constant revels, etc.). He's not saying these are not pleasurable, but having insatiable appetites for them is detrimental to your physical health and mental tranquility, the goal of a blessed life (Men.128)

#### [Quote from Max DuBoff](#)

When I emphasize tranquility, it's in this context. PD 25 is the lode star of my interpretation: "If you do not, on every occasion, refer each of your actions to the goal of nature, but instead stop short at something else when making either avoidance or pursuit, your actions will not follow arguments" (trans. Inwood and Gerson, with my modifications). I understand "the goal of nature" as particularly connoting katastematic pleasure (following the use of this term in Men. 133 and VS 25, where it most naturally refers to katastematic pleasure).

Why do you understand "the goal of nature" as particularly connoting katastematic pleasure? I've translated that in Men. 133 as "one who has rationally determined the τέλος of one's natural state" which I take "the natural state" to be pleasure, one's telos is to pursue pleasure. And, if I understand your previous posts, you equate "pleasure" in this sense specifically with tranquility, correct? VS25 is interesting, but I don't see how katastematic pleasure plays into that "goals of nature" VS25: *Poverty is great wealth if measured by the goals of nature, and wealth is abject poverty if not limited by the goals of nature.* I suppose it could with the same sentiment in Lucretius (5.1117-1119, emphasis added) when he talks about a "mind content":

Yet were man to steer  
His life by sounder reasoning, he'd own  
Abounding riches, if *with mind content*  
He lived by thrift; for never, as I guess,  
Is there a lack of little in the world.

To me, the goal of nature / telos / summum bonum is to live pleurably. I agree that tranquility is a vital component of the pleurable life, but, again, Epicurus specifically says in Men. 128 that "the goal of the blessed life" is "the health of the body AND the tranquility of the mind." Both bodily health and a tranquil mind: "this is the 'goal' of a 'blessed' life." To single out tranquility as THE blessed life leaves out the first part: "health of the body." Why isn't that as important as tranquility? Is "the health of the body" the other katastematic pleasure of aponia by another name? It seems me that the pleasure of those endless drinking bouts is not choice-worthy because it would be detrimental to health of the body AND the serenity of the mind.

#### [Quote from Max DuBoff](#)

Lots of pleasures are good additively: when I eat ice cream, it's always better if I eat more ice cream (other things being equal, which, to be fair, they're not). ... So these kinds of pleasures can never support a perfect life.

Your ice cream analogy, to me, breaks down along these lines, too. The idea that pleasures are good additively breaks down the same as endless drinking bouts. That also seems like Plato's argument as to why pleasure can't be The Good.

Epicurus drank with his friends, he wrote a whole work titles *Symposium* where they talked about wine and sex. I can easily see Epicurus saying a short drinking bout or a single drinking bout can be cautiously engaged in. It's the endless string that's leads to pain. Same with ice cream. A little is tasty, more and more leads to indigestion and pain. This is where prudence is the most important instrumental virtue. To know when to stop a given pleasure before it turns to pain is an application of practical wisdom.

I'm going to leave any deeper look at katastematic and kinetic pleasure for the light of day. I think it's a useful categorization or at least interesting. If Epicurus thought it was important enough to point out, that's good enough for me to try and get a handle on it. (There are some who think Epicurus didn't even teach this, but I can't agree with that direction.)

I don't know if this is illuminating for my position, but this is what I get for putting this off until late at night.