

# Episode 317 - TD43 - The Epicurean "System Of Counterbalancing" In Pursuit Of Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of January 17, 2026 at 1:50 PM

Last week's Episode was entitled "Happiness Is The Goal of Life - A Life of Happiness Is A Life of Pleasure."

As we close in on the end of Tusculan Disputations, I'd like to continue to emphasize not only that each one of these two prongs is controversial, but that there is another prong that's equally or more important:

1 - "Happiness is the goal of life" is hotly disputed by religion (which claims piety) and humanism/Platonism/Stoicism (which claims "virtue" or "being a good person." Many people loosely agree that they want to be happy, but they view happiness is a very non-Epicurean way.

2 - The dispute about prong one is why prong two is bitterly opposed. "A life of happiness is a life of pleasure" is exactly how Diogenes Laertius and Torquatus interpret Epicurus, but many - especially today - want to play word games and cite "absence of pain" or "tranquility" as the goal of life, and push "pleasure" off to the side and safely out of sight. And as a result they live lives that are very different from those which Epicurus, Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and the Epicurean leaders of the ancient world pursued.

3 - Prong three, which we need to address in this and coming episodes, is to emphasize that when Epicurus held that there are only two feelings with no middle ground, that means "pleasure" is everything not just physically but also mentally that we find to be agreeable. Far too many people hear the word "pleasure" and all they hear is "sex, drugs, and rock and roll." That's the way Cicero and most opponents of Epicurus chose to interpret him, and that's wrong, but it's pervasive.

We can say "Happiness is the goal of life," and "a life of happiness is a life of pleasure" all day long, but unless we can articulate the full meaning of pleasure as Epicurus advocated for it, the other two statements are largely worthless. "Happiness is the goal of life" can and has been said by many different types of philosophers, and "A life of happiness is a life of pleasure" is 9 times out of 10 going to be understood as the slogan of a party animal.

Only a clear and full explanation of Epicurus' use of the word "pleasure" can give legitimate meaning to "happiness is the goal of life" and "a life of happiness is a life of pleasure."

Torquatus and Diogenes of Oinoanda were able to do it, and the existence of legions of other intelligent Greek and Roman Epicureans are evidence that many others could too.

We today can do the same.