

# Happy Twentieth of July: Remembering That Pleasure Has Many Enemies

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Happy Twentieth of July!

At the time of Epicurus, the most advanced criticism against Pleasure as the Good was probably [Plato's Philebus](#), which is thought to be one of Plato's last major works.

For this Twentieth, here is a perceptive paragraph by Benjamin Jowett, the translator of the standard English edition of [Philebus](#), in which Jowett explains the great resistance to the idea of pleasure as the greatest good.

Here Jowett, after summarizing the argument in [Philebus](#), emphasizes to us that the Platonists of the world will never leave Epicureans in peace, and will always fight against it:

## Quote

There have been many reasons why not only Plato but mankind in general have been unwilling to acknowledge that 'pleasure is the chief good.' Either they have heard a voice calling to them out of another world; or the life and example of some great teacher has cast their thoughts of right and wrong in another mould; or the word 'pleasure' has been associated in their mind with merely animal enjoyment. They could not believe that what they were always striving to overcome, and the power or principle in them which overcame, were of the same nature. The pleasure of doing good to others and of bodily self-indulgence, the pleasures of intellect and the pleasures of sense, are so different:—Why then should they be called by a common name? Or, if the equivocal or metaphorical use of the word is justified by custom (like the use of other words which at first referred only to the body, and then by a figure have been transferred to the mind), still, why should we make an ambiguous word the corner-stone of moral philosophy? To the higher thinker the Utilitarian or hedonist mode of speaking has been at variance with religion and with any higher conception both of politics and of morals. It has not satisfied their imagination; it has offended their taste. To elevate pleasure, 'the most fleeting of all things,' into a general idea seems to such men a contradiction. They do not desire to bring down their theory to the level of their practice.

The study of Epicurus has never been a matter of food and drink and dance and song; it is been the struggle of those who push religion and idealistic political goals against the idea that people should live to pursue happiness.

When we study Epicurus we need to be aware that we are not simply studying the kind of "how-to-be-happy" self-help book that get thrown around like lightweight "Chicken Soup For the Soul" pop advise. We are talking about a philosophy which has been in rebellion and regimented establishment forces for 2000 years, and will remain so as long as those forces continue to claim the right to rule over other people.

Epicurus understood that the world was against him. When we read Epicurus we need to realize that they were written in a context with many bitter enemies arrayed against them, and if we don't understand the arguments against pleasure, we won't fully understand the arguments for pleasure in surviving texts.