

# Welcome Max Duboff

Post by “Max DuBoff” of July 3, 2026 at 8:27 AM

## [Quote from wbernys](#)

So pleasure is clearly the absolute goal, but mostly defined the absence of disturbance, which is itself a pleasure. I don't think ultimate pleasure, but certainly a pleasure worth pursuing, like all others if not outweighed by pain.

I've now reread the thread, and I'm going to respond to a number of posts, but I think it'd be more helpful to write a few paragraphs than respond to individual points. If there's an individual point from upthread which you think is important for the conversation but which I don't address here, please do feel free to reraise it.

I think wbernys's point quoted above (first sentence) is closest to my own view. Let me lay out some of my interpretation of Epicurus.

It's clear from the Letter to Menoecus that pleasure is the good. Anything good is such that we should pursue it (DL 10.33; Men. 128-130). But there are lots of pleasures. So how do we know which to pursue? This is where blessedness comes in. All pleasures are choiceworthy (by which I just mean to-be-chosen, or, there's sufficient justification to pursue them), but only some pleasures lead to blessedness. This is Cicero's crucial mistake. 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 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).

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).

So, all pleasure is good and is worthy of pursuit. When figuring out what to do, figure out first and foremost what will lead to blessedness, which Epicurus identifies as tranquility. One should only pursue other pleasures when they do not interfere with blessedness.

But why is tranquility the pleasure that confers a blessed life? Epicurus, like many Greek philosophers, thinks that a good life is a perfect life (pantelēs; PD 20, 21; Pyth. 116). It's not

clear to me exactly why he holds this assumption (very curious for your thoughts; I think this is one of the big puzzles of his ethics, for which we don't have extant sources). "Perfect" in this sense means "not able to be made better, in the respect in which it's good." But pleasure fits a bit awkwardly with this assumption. 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). Or it's always better if I'm looking at a beautiful view for longer, and looking at more beautiful views. So these kinds of pleasures can never support a perfect life.

Tranquility is blessedness because it's the only pleasure that can be perfect in this sense. That's why PD 3 speaks of the "limit of the magnitude of pleasures"; once pain is absent, pleasure cannot be made better in the respect in which it's good. If blessedness were based at all on goods like ice cream or beautiful views, it'd never be able to be made perfect, because we could always have more ice cream or beautiful views. Blessedness/tranquility isn't best because it allows for ice cream or beautiful views to be enjoyed painlessly (in my view); it's best because it's the only pleasure that allows for a perfect life, and a good life must be a perfect life. Nonetheless, tranquility as a matter of fact allows us to enjoy many other pleasures painlessly, and that's great. We very much welcome those pleasures, even though they don't have a role in making our lives blessed.

This all leaves open what the relationship is between kinetic and katastematic pleasure. I should note that there are substantively different views of the relationship between kinetic and katastematic pleasure, and of what pleasure is. Cassius was raising Gosling and Taylor, who argue that kinetic and katastematic pleasure are two ways of describing the same thing. This is controversial (and not my view), but it's certainly a view with plenty of interesting arguments in its favor. I'm going to crib a footnote from one of my drafts to show how I classify the different views of katastematic pleasure:

The most influential view is that katastematic pleasure is the unimpeded atomic condition of the mind or body, and pain is a disturbance to this condition (Diano 1974a: 45-47; 1974b: 82-90; 1974c: 168-170; Rist 1972: 102-114, 170-172; Purinton 1993: 306-307; Wolfsdorf 2013: 162; Arenson 2019: 85-108). Others consider kinetic and katastematic pleasure to be different ways of describing the same phenomenon (Gosling and Taylor 1982: 365-396; Hossenfelder 1986: 255-258; Striker 1993: 17; [Nikolsky](#) 2001). Others consider katastematic pleasure to be the intentional object of a mental state (Tsouna 1985: 151-155; Purinton 1993: 283-291, 300-302; Erler and Schofield 1999: 655-657; Splawn 2002: 476-481). Mitsis (1988) considers katastematic pleasure to be the fulfillment of needs.