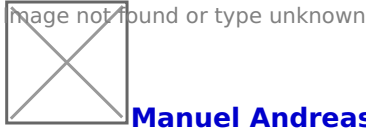


What Is An Example of a Natural But Not Necessary Desire?

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 6:15 PM



[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) February 24 at 10:24pm

Writing a chapter on Epicurus and asking for your help: some authors claim that an example for a desire that is natural but not necessary is, for him, sexual desire, others that it would be exotic foods and drinks...is there a reliable source about that? Thanks!

[Cassius Amicus](#) type ur [Cassius Amicus](#) **My comment is that the implication of stating the question this way is going to lead to a fundamental misunderstanding. The authoritative statement from Epicurus is only this from the letter to Menoeceus: "We must consider that of desires some are natural, others vain, and of the natural some are necessary and others merely natural; and of the necessary some are necessary for happiness, others for the repose of the body, and others for very life. The right understanding of these facts enables us to refer all choice and avoidance to the health of the body and (the soul's) freedom from disturbance, since this is the aim of the life of blessedness. "**

And close behind in authority is this from Torquatus in Cicero's "On Ends": "Nothing could be more instructive, more helpful to right living, 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 neither natural nor necessary. The principle of classification is 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. In contrast, for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered."

You are not going to find a list of what fits under what category, and all suggestions that there is a hard and fast list are speculation and in my view contrary to the fundamentals of Epicurean philosophy. What we have instead is the statements in the letter to Menoeceus that " 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." ... "And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good."

All of the ones you have listed (sex, exotic food, exotic drink) are natural, but not necessary, but that does not at all answer the question as to whether a particular Epicurean would pursue them at a particular time and a particular place. Because:

"And again independence of desire we think a great good — not that we may at all times enjoy but a few things, but that, if we do not possess many, we may enjoy the few in the genuine persuasion that those have the sweetest enjoy luxury pleasure in luxury who least need it, and that all that is natural is easy to be obtained, but that which is superfluous is hard. And so plain savours bring us a pleasure equal to a luxurious diet, when all the pain due to want is removed; and bread and water produce the highest pleasure, when one who needs them puts them to his lips. To grow accustomed therefore to simple and not luxurious diet gives us health to the full, and makes a man alert for the needful employments of life, and when after long intervals we approach luxuries disposes us better towards them, and fits us to be fearless of fortune."

And in the Vatican sayings it is stated explicitly 63 "Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess."

So my contention is that there is no absolute list of what desires should be engaged in or refrained from that apply to all men at all times and all places, which is what a list of explicit desires/pleasures would entail. Even the worst of debauchery would not be prohibited if in fact those choices led to pleasant living (PD10) And sometimes even fame and power can succeed in producing a pleasant life (PD7). It is easy enough to say that air and water are necessary and natural, and that iPhones are neither natural nor necessary, but that analysis really means nothing without knowledge of the context of the person making the decision about whether to choose or avoid it. All pleasure is "good," and there is no intrinsic "evil" in Epicurean philosophy other than pain itself. The categories are of assistance in thinking about the cost/benefit issues that are involved, but there is no list that everyone must

follow - every person in every question must make the same analysis - what will happen to me if I choose or avoid this particular action? (Vatican 71: "Every desire must be confronted by this question: what will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished and what if it is not?")

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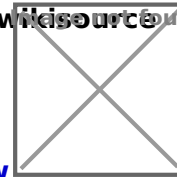
[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) Image not found or type unknown

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) could you please give me the exact reference to Cicero's "On Ends"?

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

[Cassius Amicus](#) i don't have the line number Manuel but you can word search the paragraph and find it here and many other places - I have a link here to the Rackham version and i think it is on [this source](#) too Image not found or type unknown



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[Torquatus On the Highest Good - EpicureanDocs.com](#)

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

[Cassius Amicus](#) Looking for a page and line here -

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[Cicero, Marcus Tullius, On Ends - De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum](#)

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[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#)

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) Thanks a lot! Image not found  Image not found or type unknown

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Cassius Amicus

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[Hiram Crespo](#) or type unknown

[Hiram Crespo](#) PD 26. All desires that do not lead to pain when they remain unsatisfied are unnecessary, but the desire is easily got rid of, when the thing desired is difficult to obtain or the desires seem likely to produce harm.

<https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...CQcYSCyO4uSz9gQ>

[Epicurus - Principal Doctrines](#)

[Principal Doctrines](#) by Epicurus (341-270 B.C.)

EPICURUS.NET

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) if it leads to pain when unsatisfied, it's necessary. if it doesn't, it's unnecessary.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Good catch, Hiram! [PD26](#) gives a slightly different slant than the one Cicero used, but from either standpoint it seems to me it always remains necessary to carry out the [VS71](#) analysis: "Every desire must be confronted by this question: what will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished and what if it is not?"

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[Ron Warrick](#) or type unknown

[Ron Warrick](#) Epicurean: Life is basically easy if you don't desire too much, so don't screw it up by indulging desires unnecessarily.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) However in relation to that it is clearly possible to err by not

indulging desires enough: 63 "Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess."

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Ron Warrick

[Ron Warrick](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) Exceeding the limit of frugality would indicate an unhealthy desire for something other than what a wise purchase might provide, so the "however" is in a way superfluous.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Interesting to consider that [PD26](#) implies that "unfulfilled desire" is not by definition painful in all cases, or else [PD26](#) would make no sense. Next time we talk about the relationship of 'removal of pain' to pleasure (the 'replenishment' theory) we need to remember that cite

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) The subtext churning beneath the question of the proper use of these categories is one of the biggest issues dividing people in understanding Epicurus today. Are we using these categories to (1) calibrate desire down toward a minimum target (pursuing ONLY what is natural AND necessary) or are we using the categories to (2) assist us in predicting the cost in pain of any action against the pleasure that would result (so as to attain the maximum pleasure at reasonable cost in pain)? I contend interpretation 1 is asceticism and stoicism and error, and that interpretation 2 is what Epicurus intended because it is compelled by pleasure as the guide of life and the short span of time in which we have to follow it. Why would anyone who is convinced that this life is all we have ever contend that we should accept less pleasure in life than is possible at a reasonable cost of pain? Cicero was right in stating that the Epicurean goal is "a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasure." The only way to avoid that conclusion is to rip the fabric out of pleasure as ordinarily understood by holding that Epicurus did not refer to ordinary pleasure but instead redefined "pleasure" as a mysterious negative ("absence of pain") - which is why the meaning and intent of that phrase is one of the other big controversies in Epicurean studies.

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Gary Purdy and or type unknown

Gary Purdy Oh, not calibrate, too much reason

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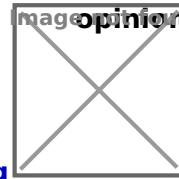
Manuel Andreas Knoll

Manuel Andreas Knoll My weekend will be devoted to form an opinion on exactly this problem...I'd like to come out with (2) as a result (as you say, (1) is too close to stoicism and ascetism) but PD III and other statements point towards (1) and Marcuses's term "negative hedonism" for Epucurus...maybe the key is the interpretation of PD XVIII

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Manuel if you are studying this issue I have collected further cites and references to support my opinion here



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[Full Cup Fullness of Pleasure Model](#)

Link to Larger Version of Graphic It is observed too that in his treatise On the Ethical End he...
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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus I should also have mentioned Manuel that I completely agree that PD3 (and PD4) are troublesome when using the standard viewpoint, and IMO they must be judged as responses to Plato's [philebus](#). That is what I go into in my link on the fullness of pleasure model...

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#)

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) Thank you all! I guess I should have explained myself a bit better. My question started off by interpreting the fundamental classification in LM (DL X 127) in combination with PD 26 (DL X 148). That is why I doubt that sexual desires - clearly natural - are not necessary because if they remain not satisfied in the long run they will lead likely, and for most people, to some pain on a psycho-emotional level, frustration or perversions etc.. This not the case with exotic drinks and foods. So the latter seems to be a better example for a desire that is natural not not necessary. Would you agree?

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[Ilkka Vuoristo](#) or type unknown

[Ilkka Vuoristo](#) You're seeking an artificially clear-cut answer to a question that can't have one. All desires are had by individuals who have to discover which desires are necessary to themselves. Epicurean Philosophy doesn't contain a master list of the approved desires.

It's possible that most people would say that a good sexual relationship is a "must-have", but then there are people for whom sexual pleasure has no interest or who can easily ignore/replace it. The goal of the philosophy is to guide people in their choices, not to dictate which choices are the 'right' ones.

When we are talking about sexuality, we also have to remember that we are most likely missing a key part from the writings of Epicurus. The extant works say contrary things about it.

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[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#)

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) Well, I am confronted with secondary literature that all presents clear-cut answers and I am questioning some of those....and in case of exotic food and beverages I'd say from a philosophical perspective there is a clear-cut answer that they are not necessary, however, many people feel pain if they can't afford them....I think philosophical guidance often means distinguishing between necessary and unnecessary desires...and I'd also say Epicurus was quite authoritative at times...isn't the standard the wise man and his desires?

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Manuel I think the answer to your question has to come from realizing that Epicurus builds up from a foundation, and once established he does not contradict himself as he goes forward. The secondary literature is primarily stoic (or Aristotelian or Platonic or general anti-Epicurean) influenced and incorrectly forces Epicurus into their mode of thinking. If you have the time the best book that explores this the deepest in my view is Gosling & Taylor "The Greeks on Pleasure" - and in tracing back the history it is easier to see that the ascetic model of Epicurus cannot be correct. Yes Epicurus WAS authoritative - even dogmatic - on certain issues, but he was dogmatic first and foremost that success in pleasurable living (measured not by abstract "objective" reason but by the faculty of pleasure) is the only standard set by nature, and the means of achieving it are purely instrumental and will vary by context with the individual and the situation involved.

Another example of this which may be even more clear is to compare Epicurus in the [PD40](#)'s as to justice (where is it crystal clear that justice is not absolute and varies from person to person and by situation) to the classic Cicero/Platonic/Stoic "true law is right reason in accord with nature ...and there will not be different laws in Rome and Athens..." formulation. The other philosophies are postulating a "reasonable man" standard emanating from the universal divine fire/god that will apply to everyone. In the non-supernatural atomistic infinite universe of Epicurus such a single standard is nonsense.

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Manuel Andreas Knoll

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) Thank you, this is all very helpful! And I like that interpretation that leaves room for individual differences and contexts...a confirmation could be Vatican 51 although that is likely from Metrodorus

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Exactly Manuel good catch! "You tell me that the stimulus of the flesh makes you too prone to the pleasures of love. Provided that you do not break the laws or good customs and do not distress any of your neighbors or do harm to your body or squander y...[See More](#)

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Cassius Amicus

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) And whenever I mention books I have to suggest Manuel Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy" which flies in the face of most of the conventional secondary literature. A large part of the difficulty in reconciling how Epicurus' views on pleasure fit together is to realize that Epicurus was fighting Plato's premises and attacking the arguments made by Plato in [Philebus](#) as to limits and purity and mixed states. If you don't see the Anti-Platonism and understand that these arguments have a background and context, then it can indeed look like there are contradictions in Epicurus that make no sense. But understanding the background (such as that there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, so that *quantitatively* it becomes a truism that absence of one means the presence of the other) is IMHO the key to seeing how these deep references (such as only needing pleasure when we have pain) fit together into the big picture.

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Manuel Andreas Knoll

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) Absolutely, the views in Plato's [Philebus](#) are a strong opponent for Epicurus, so was the Academy

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) I fully agree with [Ilkka Vuoristo](#) on his full comment and in relation to this especially: "Epicurean Philosophy doesn't contain a master list of the approved desires." << That way of saying it reminds me to also point out the related observation that Epicurean Philosophy doesn't contain a master list of the HIGHER AND LOWER desires" either. We see all the time people influenced by other perspectives trying to say that natural and necessary are "HIGHER" desires (as if they are intrinsically more "noble" or "worthy" according to some mystical standard). That isn't supported in Epicurean theory at all - pleasure is pleasure, and the only natural standard is whether the activity in fact leads to more pleasure and less pain

or the reverse.

That's another example of grafting a Stoic standard onto Epicurus and it is very misleading to attempt to do so.

Once again this is an issue that DeWitt explores extensively in his "fullness of pleasure" and "unity of pleasure" discussion.

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Manuel Andreas Knoll

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) However, PD XVIII seems to distinguish physical and intellectual pleasure and thus to anticipate Mill's views

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) And Torquatus also says explicitly that mental pleasures and pain can be more intense. But that isn't a "higher/lower" standard but purely a practical analysis in which pleasure itself remains the standard.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Manuel IMO you are wrestling with some of the most important questions in Epicurus. I hope if you are writing a paper or a summary you will let us know what you come up with so we can read it. My page of references is very much a work in progress so if you find references / arguments that are relevant I would very much like to add them to help others find them in the future.

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Manuel Andreas Knoll

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) Well, I am just writing a subchap. in my De Gruyter studybook "Ancient Greek Philosophy" which is in German....it took me eight years to arrive at chap. 12: The Hellenistic Philosophers...I'd be glad to send you the subchap. when it

is finished 1f642.png 

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Manuel Andreas Knoll

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) Image may contain: 1 person

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Manuel Andreas Knoll

[Manuel Andreas Knoll](#) But when this task and some others is completed I will work on my own views that should be published in a book with the working title "The Hedonist Ethics"....then I hope we can have some more discussions...but there is still a long way to go...if you give me your email-address I could send you small paper I have written for Italian colleagues that I have recently completed on "Critical Theory and Hedonism: The Central Role of Aristippus of Kyrene for Theodor W. Adorno's Thought"

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) On whether sex is necessary, the thousands of cases of abuse of children in every continent by clergy that claims to be celibate appear to demonstrate that

1. Celibacy is unnatural and
2. Human beings need erotic affection and love

To what extent seems to be the key. Perhaps we can study human nature and come up with a "natural measure of sex" that is necessary for most people. I am not familiar with any empirical studies on this.

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Manuel Andreas Knoll

Manuel Andreas Knoll good point

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Bartosz Morzynski page not found or type unknown

Bartosz Morzynski That is strawman argument. It's not even correlation.

There are thousands, if not millions, of people who live normally without having regular sex.

If anything your example could be used as a proof that pleasure cannot be ultimate good, because it can lead to bad outcomes (pedophilia, rape, etc.).

Like · Reply · February 28 at 4:16pm

Hiram Crespo page not found or type unknown

Hiram Crespo Bartosz Morzynski that makes no sense. If rape and pedophilia are caused by repression of libido that means that those who engage in them have NOT set pleasure as the goal and have not treated sex as a natural need that needs a healthy outlet

Like · Reply · February 28 at 4:18pm

Bartosz Morzynski

Bartosz Morzynski Hiram Crespo I'll use an example.

Someone believes that pleasure (including sex) is the ultimate good. He's not repressing his libido, He's actually doing his best every weekend and sometimes even weekdays to get that pleasure, but with no luck. However he still believes sexual desire needs to be fulfilled, it's a pleasure after all. So he decides to spike someone's drink with ruffies - he doesn't want to keep his libido waiting any longer and fulfilling his sexual desire will bring him pleasure, which means it's a good thing.

Pleasure as ultimate good + no libido suppression = rape.

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Mish Taylor and or type unknown

[Mish Taylor](#) [Bartosz Morzynski](#) 1. A blessed and indestructible being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; so he is free from anger and partiality, for all such things imply weakness.

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Bartosz Morzynski

[Bartosz Morzynski](#) [Mish Taylor](#) How do we recollect it with the doctrine that pleasure is the ultimate good though? Which one takes priority - not harming others or pleasure? If it's the first, then it's not Epicureanism.

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Jason Baker and or type unknown

[Jason Baker](#) Bartosz Morzynski, sex doesn't have to involve another person, unless you're missing both hands. Masturbation does you no harm and harms no other, unlike rape. The former would be the Epicurean solution, the latter, not so much.

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) Bartosz Morzynski the [Principal doctrines](#) say that such a man, as a rapist, will never be able to secure his ataraxia as he doesn't know if and when he will be uncovered. Think of Bill Cosby's fall at the end of a hugely successful life.

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Mish Taylor

[Mish Taylor](#) [Bartosz Morzynski](#) As with most things, you should make considered choices, if the 'pleasure' is unnecessary and in achieving it you harm another, that makes you an 'a-hole'. As Hiram points out, this would be forever on your conscience and would cause some deep rooted dis-pleasure.

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) From the Letter to Menoeceus: "He who has a clear and certain understanding of these things will direct every preference and aversion toward securing health of body and tranquillity of mind, seeing that this is the sum and end of a blessed life...."

And...[See More](#)

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) Note ****tranquility of mind **** is needed for a life of stable and steady pleasure. And note that our teaching says that not all pleasures are therefore to be chosen, and not all pains avoided. If you study this in good faith you will be able to plan a life filled with pleasures

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Bartosz Morzynski

[Bartosz Morzynski](#) [Hiram Crespo](#) That's a great quote.

It appears to me that the main reason why Epicureanism is misunderstood is because people apply Socratic reasoning to Epicureanism ("if something is 'good' it should be always chosen")....[See More](#)

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Bartosz Morzynski

[Bartosz Morzynski](#) [Mish Taylor](#) Problem arises when an individual doesn't consider his act bad nor his conscience is being tormented by realization of what he did.

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Mish Taylor

[Mish Taylor](#) [Bartosz Morzynski](#) Well he wouldn't be an Epicurean then, as I said he would be an A-hole.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) "maybe it's due to translation and in original ancient Greek it doesn't appear to be"

I think you've nailed it [Bartosz Morzynski](#).

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) We re not going to change doctrine but there is no need. People just have to sincerely study it, and not superficially. Also the reason why we do not have tranquility as the end is because there is no real equivalency between the pleasure and aversion ...[See More](#)

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) In other words this philosophy does not tell you what to do or give you absolutes. It empowers you to use your mind and senses and faculties in all choices and avoidances.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) [Mish Taylor](#) "Well he wouldn't be an Epicurean then, as I said he would be an A-hole." << Bingo. He would either be a A-hole, or not human, and with Epicurean ethics we are talking about humans.

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Bartosz Morzynski

[Bartosz Morzynski](#) [Mish Taylor](#) [Cassius Amicus](#) that's a typical True Scotsman fallacy. We can call those people "animals", "inhuman", etc. but the fact remains no matter how you dress it - they are still humans. And those humans can easily apply Epicurean philosophy to their life and be content with it (pursue pleasure that doesn't bring any long-term pain - everything seems in accordance with Epicurean doctrine).

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) "Or another way of fixing misconception with Epicureanism would be to say that "tranquility is a the ultimate good" (of course I'm not trying to convince anyone to start changing the main doctrine of 25 century old philosophy, it's only my observation). This way it would make more logical sense to say that pleasure is *usually* to be one of the most important things in life, however if it brings more pain in a long-term, then it is to be avoided. Otherwise we have sort of paradox" <<< No, down this road lies disaster, unless you want to redefine tranquility and give it a special meaning. The "smoothness" of our experience of pleasure IS a secondary consideration to experiencing pleasure - the calculation is not how smooth, but the next balance of pleasure over pain, with smoothness being one of the factors in weighing that balance. But sometimes lack of smoothness is necessary, such as in fighting a battle or war for self-preservation. There is no

"faculty of tranquility" which would allow measuring tranquility in the abstract. there are only faculties of pleasure and pain.

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Mish Taylor

[Mish Taylor](#) [Bartosz Morzynski](#) I am quite sure that you are old enough to have realised that some humans are not very nice humans, just because they perceive themselves otherwise, does not make it so. In your earlier post the scenario you depicted involved spiking a drink, this is pre-meditated with the aim of taking advantage of & indeed violating another human. I'll say it again - the act of an A-HOLE!

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) Maybe we should start another discussion on abnormal psychology as we seem to have a bit of thread-drift here, or bring it back around to how perversion can be inculcated by culture.

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Bartosz Morzynski

[Bartosz Morzynski](#) [Mish Taylor](#) I understand and fully agree. I'm just trying to point out that Epicurean model cannot be applied to every human being, because - as you pointed out - if an asshole adapts it, he can follow it to the letter and remain asshole. You cannot sa...[See More](#)

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Mish Taylor

[Mish Taylor](#) Goodnight [Bartosz](#) , if you do discover today's utopia, come back and tell us your findings, be happy, enjoy life and peace of mind 1f642.png 😊

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Bartosz Morzynski

[Bartosz Morzynski](#) [Mish Taylor](#) Utopia doesn't exist, nor will it ever exist, but to my understanding the surest way of coming close to happy, good life is by finding (or creating by yourself) a concept which in theory could give rise to it ("You can't ever reach perfection, but you can believe in an asymptote toward which you are ceaselessly striving.").

Thank you and have a good night! 1f642.png



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Jason Baker

Jason Baker Bartosz Morzynski, there are 40 [principal doctrines](#), not one. Ignoring that and stripping everything away to "Pleasure is the chief good" without the context of the rest of it is to equate it with limitless hedonism. The thing that distinguishes Epicurean philosophy from other hedonistic philosophies are the limits of pleasure. Do you think you're the first person to level this criticism at Epicurean philosophy? Epicurus anticipated you, friend.

"He who is acquainted with the natural limits of life understands that those things that remove the pain that arises from need, and those things which make the whole of life complete, are easily obtainable, and that he has no need of those things that can only be attained with trouble."

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Bartosz Morzynski

Bartosz Morzynski **Jason Baker** Of course not, that is an assumption that you made, not me 1f609.png Just because someone (many people, in fact) had similar questions doesn't mean I can't ask them, right?

And I understand that there are other doctrines, but to my understanding ...[See More](#)

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Jason Baker

Jason Baker Of course you may ask [Bartosz!](#)

Some of the error may even be my fault as I wrote principle doctrines as opposed to [principal doctrines](#). There is a world of difference between the definition of the two words in English. In Greek Κύριαι Δόξαι is quite clear, they are key, controlling, most important doctrines.

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Post by "Titus" of March 13, 2021 at 8:51 PM

I have been interested in the classification of desires by Epicurus from my very beginning in reading on Epicureanism. Mainly perhaps his distinction is presented very prominently in the Letter to Menoeceus and it also catches attraction due to Epicurus' various sayings concerning needs and desires. I think the question how to handle one's life is of great importance. It has meaning that Epicurus addresses this questions. Even Norman DeWitt mentions Epicurus' classification (St. Paul and Epicurus) as of being important and widely know in the ancient world (perhaps of the quotation in Cicero?).

Personally, I refer to the classification of desires rather as a "focus on" distinction than an enumeration of "do's and don'ts". There is no simple list which leads to a simple living of happiness (I already know the critique on understanding Epicurus as a yogi master, sitting in the garden meditating on why there are holes in his piece of cheese 😊). We just can approach more and more closer as we ask and train ourselves on this field practically.

I would like to summarize my personal understanding:

Necessary and natural are all those desires rooted in our natural condition. Epicurus further distinguishes between simply "being", "health" and "happiness". This means we have to secure the very conditions of our "being" and to take care for our "health". I would suggest, searching for "happiness" could mean being active in philosophing, because this frees from fear and is a precondition of recognizing that everything you have to focus on is closely to your hands and easy to achieve.

Just natural but not necessary are those things, which are related to natural stimuli but do only increase the quality of a natural impulse. I do not agree with Hegel who also commented on this, saying in one sentence that Epicurus means sexual desire. In its beginning, I would suggest sexuality is rather a stimulus you also have to face necessarily. What Epicurus could really mean is how to decide and to apply in respect of the proportionality of a topic. It is like in law, you cannot say this is right and this is wrong. It always depends on.

Not natural is anything else. I think this topic addresses us to invest some thinking about, because what should not be necessary or derived from a necessity in our lives? This could be everything that is not rooted in nature and sensual feeling, but in abstract ideas. Sometimes these may be corruptions of natural stimuli, e.g. searching for fame, power and superiority. Usually, you don't need them if you have everything else achieved in the natural and necessary category rightfully.

Epicurus presents a theory grounded in our sensation and perception in respect of the physical nature of things. Nevertheless, this theory is also open to some kind of reasoned variative applicability, as I would understand the category of natural but not necessary desires. It is capable of opposing other ideas alike, e.g. the Stoic idea of abstract controlling, which lacks a

real grounding.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 14, 2021 at 12:43 AM

First, I think that it's important to be clear that the natural/unnatural, necessary/unnecessary distinctions refer to *desires*, not pleasures. All pleasures are good, but some lead to more pain than pleasure.

With that in mind, I see natural desires as those that will bring me a balance of pleasure when I successfully pursue them. Unnatural desires are those that bring me more overall pain than pleasure.

Dialing in tighter to necessary and unnecessary desires, all desires that I consider unnatural for me I also think of as unnecessary. I only occasionally consider whether a natural desire is also necessary although I typically find it quite useful when I do. This consideration can take into account my personal interests as well as finances, health and energy, time commitment, family situation and how it impacts other desires of mine.

Notably, all these considerations can change over time due to life stages or changing short term circumstances.

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2021 at 1:25 AM

Thanks for bumping this thread Titus after almost for years - it is of continuing interest for the reasons that you say. Skimming over what I wrote four years ago I would say basically the same thing, but I think today I have a greater appreciation of the "natural and necessary" discussion being a useful teaching and application method. My concerns have always been more targeted on how I think the observation is used nowadays more than anything else. Sort of like my view of the tetrapharmakon, my concerns are not so much that there are things lacking in the way they were originally presented as much as how attitudes I think are prevalent today encourage their misinterpretation.

Even though no specific list that fits everyone everywhere and all the time is practical, certainly the idea of evaluating our choices according to whether the choice is necessary for life, and whether it stems from needs that are "natural" to all of us, will be of assistance in calculating expected costs and benefits from selecting particular choices. My concern that people should not expect to discover a "magical" list does not take away from the real benefit that someone

who approaches the questions properly can gain from the analysis. I do still think that this is one area that Cicero relayed pretty faithfully, and that it is accurate to say that "the principle of classification [is] 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."

Post by "Elayne" of March 14, 2021 at 8:37 AM

I consider unnatural desires to be desires for things which do not exist, because everything in nature, whatever has existence, is natural.

Desire for unlimited power, idealistic freedom, absolute beauty, immortality, omniscience -- these are desires for the unreal which cannot ever be satisfied.

Since everything real is by definition natural, I am only left with deciding whether my decision to pursue a desire will likely lead to more pleasure than pain, or not.

If desire for a particular item or experience going unfulfilled will not affect my ability to enjoy life one way or another, then it's obviously not strictly necessary-- but if pursuing it won't cause me more pain than pleasure, it's also not necessary to skip it. I am free to decide based on my preferences.

I think this perspective keeps the focus on both materiality and pleasure rather than introducing extra unnecessary factors.

Post by "Elayne" of March 14, 2021 at 8:44 AM

And really, if you try to define "natural" in any other way besides some relationship to "real", then what is natural cannot be applied to all of us. If something is real, it has existence independently of us-- if the unnatural is the unreal, it's unreal for everyone. Nobody can have omniscience, for instance.

If you make natural something an organism is innately disposed to want, then natural will vary between organisms, because no two are identical. Even clones are affected by epigenetics/environment. I think in that case natural would be indistinguishable from personal preference, and he's clearly talking about something different.

Post by “Don” of March 14, 2021 at 12:37 PM

I think [Elayne](#) is onto something here.

It's important to note that Epicurus didn't say desires could be categorized into "natural" and "unnatural" although that's an easy dichotomy to make in English. He called the desires in the Letter to Menoikeus:

μέν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί

"On the one hand, (some are the) φυσικαί; on the other hand, (others are) the κεναί"

φυσικαί (physikai - compare English physical, physics, etc) = natural, produced or caused by nature, inborn, native; physical, having to do with the study of the material world (Antonyms: διδακτός (didaktós), νομικός (nomikós))

κεναί is our old familiar kenos = empty; vain, fruitless; exhausted, void, destitute (Antonyms: μεστός (mestós), πλήρης (plérēs))

I find it interesting that Epicurus didn't use a common set of antonyms: natural/unnatural; but emphasized the source of desires. Some derive from natural sources, some arise from fruitless sources that can never be quenched.

Post by “Don” of March 14, 2021 at 1:22 PM

Additionally...

127g. καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον; (kai tōn physikōn hai men anangkaiai, hai de physikai monon;) "And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the only natural ones."

ἀναγκαίων (anangkaiōn) "necessary, essential"

127h. τῶν δ' ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, (tōn d' anangkaiōn hai men pros eudaimonian eisin anangkaiai,)

"then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia;"

127i. αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν.

ἀοχλησία "freedom from disturbance"

"then, those [necessary] *for the freedom from disturbance for the body*; then those [necessary] for life itself."

There are some translations that interpret αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν to mean things like clothing and shelter - those things that provide "freedom from disturbance" for the body, that is for one's physical existence. That isn't literally what is written so that is simply one interpretation. Those necessary for life itself are, one might suppose, those at the base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: food, water, shelter, sleep, air, etc. Those necessary for eudaimonia may be even a little more open to interpretation but still have to be based on Epicurus's philosophy.

Post by "Don" of March 14, 2021 at 2:10 PM

Here's my interpretation of KD29:

29Τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι **φυσικαὶ <καὶ ἀναγκαῖαι>** αἱ δὲ **φυσικαὶ** καὶ οὐκ ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ **οὔτε φυσικαὶ οὔτε ἀναγκαῖαι** ἀλλὰ παρὰ κενὴν δόξαν γινόμεναι.

DB - Of the cravings, first there are those that are natural and required [to live], then there are those that are natural but not required, and, finally, there are those that are neither natural nor required which come to be along with empty beliefs (κενὴν δόξαν (kenēn doxan) beliefs devoid of merit).

Post by "Joshua" of March 15, 2021 at 5:57 PM

My conclusion after reading this is that my command of the source texts has seriously declined! I'm quite impressed with some of you!

If we could say for certain, for everybody and for all times and places, that:

A.) a given desire is unnatural and unnecessary, *and*

B.) That we *ought* not pursue unnatural and unnecessary desires,

Then we will have *ipso facto* established a (false) universal ethical law. Epicurus makes it plain elsewhere that there are no absolute universal ethical laws. So he *cannot* be saying what people think he is saying. These categories are observations to aid with the business of living, not premises to aid with the business of Logic. Maybe they're helpful, maybe they're not; from my point of view it certainly seems that they cause more confusion than anything. But one thing that is clear, or should be, is that these observations are not meant to establish by inference a series of Commandments.

Quote

Well, I am confronted with secondary literature that all presents clear-cut answers and I am questioning some of those....

Sounds like Manuel was getting the right idea!

Post by “Cassius” of March 15, 2021 at 9:28 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

These categories are observations to aid with the business of living, not premises to aid with the business of Logic.

Yes I completely agree with your full post Joshua and this part in particular. It is sort of a theme of my recent Epicurean thought that it is key to watch out for the lines between logical analysis vs more strict canonical Epicurean analysis so as to avoid confusion. I do think it is necessary to play in both camps so as to be able to communicate with those on "the other side" but if you're not constantly on the lookout for the limits of logical reasoning then you're apt to be trapped. I would think this was a problem in Epicurus' day as well, but maybe it was easier to avoid when there were so many other Epicureans to assist in making sure that errors were quickly corrected.

I believe that this instance (natural and necessary) constitutes a prime example where Epicurus was willing to talk in terms that would be apt to be misconstrued if one didn't understand his premises and realize that he could NOT be talking about universally absolute standards. In my own mind I put this example next to what I think is a parallel example: that of the "limit of pleasure is the absence of pain" which cannot have been meant to convey the extreme minimalism that could be construed from it if one puts aside the bulk of the rest of the philosophy. Just as with "natural and necessary" the device can be very useful in certain types of analysis if one keeps ones head and doesn't lose sight of the big picture.

Post by “Joshua” of March 15, 2021 at 9:46 PM

Wait a minute...☐☐

From [Don](#) -ἀοχλησία is "freedom from disturbance"...

And ἐκκλησία is "a political or religious assembly"....

Do I detect a pun here? ☐☐

Post by “Don” of March 15, 2021 at 10:42 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Wait a minute...☐☐

From [Don](#) -ἀοχλησία is "freedom from disturbance"...

And ἐκκλησία is "a political or religious assembly"....

Do I detect a pun here? ☐☐

LOL. Well, if there wasn't one, there is one now! 😁 Well played!!