

# The "Natural and Necessary List" Question

**Post by "Cassius" of August 20, 2021 at 6:49 AM**

The [Natural and Necessary List Question](#) appears today again at Facebook in a question from DG - might be good to record it again here:

Ἀναλογιστέον δὲ ὡς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ  
κεναί, καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον·  
τῶν δὲ ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος  
ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν.  
τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανῆς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἴρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανά-  
γειν οἴδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀτα-  
ραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστὶ τέλος.

And one must calculate, so far as desire is concerned, that some are natural and some are empty, and among the natural desires, some are necessary, and some are only natural; and among the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, and some for the freedom of disturbance of the body, and some for life itself. For, a fixed contemplation [observation] of these desires understands every choice and avoidance to lead to the health of the body and to the tranquility of the mind, since this is the final end of the blessed life.

-Has anyone worked out a table differentiating the natural and necessary desires as they relate to happiness, freedom from physical disturbance, and the basic needs of survival? I'm curious how others here may carve out these distinctions among the field of natural and necessary desires. What is the bare minimum one needs for survival, freedom from physical disturbance, and for happiness?

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**Post by "Cassius" of August 20, 2021 at 6:49 AM**

Preliminary comments:

1) I would argue that it is not possible to draw up a specific table of natural and necessary items that would apply to all people at all times except for the most basic of things such as air, food, and water, and I would argue that is why we do not have anything like such a list from Epicurus.

2) I would argue that rather than being a list of target items, the issue involved in this is as stated by Torquatus in "On Ends" - " Nothing could be more useful or more conducive to well-being 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 as neither natural nor necessary; the principle of classification being 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." The point of this being that thinking about the consequences and the costs of any action is the way to select among them, since there is in fact no absolute rule of conduct that will tell you what to do in any situation other than to consider the resulting pain and pleasure. Thus it might be helpful for us to think about lists in a general way, but it would be a big mistake to think that any single list can be an ultimate guide of conduct.

3) I would argue that Epicurus would have said, and in fact did say, that it is a terrible mistake to target the "bare minimum needed for happiness" as anyone's goal. As is recorded in Vatican Saying 63: "Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess." "Frugality" and "simplicity" are in a sense like the virtues - the virtues can be useful as tools in pursuing pleasure, but they are not ends in themselves, and if set up as ends in themselves you make a terrible mistake about the purpose of life, thus leading Diogenes of Oinoanda to shout at you, as well as to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that \*pleasure\* is the highest end of life."

4) And to summarize these points the main issue is this: The generic and ultimate point of Epicurus is that the guide of life is "pleasure" and Epicurus is rigorously logical and practical in his approach. The goal of life is not "simple pleasure" or "worthy pleasure" or even "lasting pleasure" or "intense pleasure" -- and not "natural pleasure" or "necessary pleasure" either. Anytime you place modifiers along with "pleasure" you are limiting the goal and you are trying to force everyone into a single pattern which is not compatible with the Epicurean view of the universe, in which there is no god or absolute arbiter of conduct. Again as recorded by Torquatus in one of the most clear statements left to us: "What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?" (And the answer to that question is clear - "nothing")

[The full quote is: "I will start then in the manner approved by the author of the system himself, by settling what are the essence and qualities of the thing that is the object of our inquiry; not that I suppose you to be ignorant of it, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil. This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the

prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict. Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?"]

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2021 at 6:51 AM**

I trust my initial response efforts will meet at least mostly [Don](#) 's approval but I'll tag him to be sure and to get his current take, since this is somewhat related to the "greatest good" question we've been discussing recently.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 20, 2021 at 8:55 AM**

1) Agreed.

2) Agreed, and I especially like:

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

thinking about the consequences and the costs of any action is the way to select among them, since there is in fact no absolute rule of conduct that will tell you what to do in any situation other than to consider the resulting pain and pleasure.

3) Agreed. [VS63](#) is an important one, especially the translation you've provided. But we have to be careful of what the original says. Looks like you're quoting Bailey. Here's his Commentary on that VS:

#### [Quote from Bailey](#)

LXIII is interesting as showing that Epicurus did not wish to push his idea of the simple life to excess: the ascetic will suffer bodily distress like the glutton and so fail to attain *απονία*. The text of the first few words is corrupt but has been set right by Usener. Bignone compares Hor. Sat. I. i. 102 ff. Von der Muehl reads *εν λεπτότητι καθαριτοτης*, but I do not understand the meaning of *λεπτοτης* here.

Here is Saint-Andre's commentary on that word:

Quote from St-Andre

The phrase *έν λεπτότητι καθαριότης* is somewhat obscure; *καθαριότης* means purity, cleanliness, neatness, scrupulousness, integrity, elegance, refinement, simplicity, frugality, economy, etc., while *λεπτότης* means thinness, meagreness, fineness, delicacy, subtlety, etc. Can there be a purity in meagreness, a scrupulousness in delicacy, an integrity in fineness, a frugality in subtlety? Translating this phrase as "an elegance in simplicity" ties it to other statements Epicurus makes about both living beautifully (e.g., Vatican Saying #17) and living simply or naturally (e.g., Vatican Saying #21).

So, the fact that the first part is corrupted in the manuscript is an issue but it seems to me the general flavor of everyone's take does go in the direction Bailey takes it. Here's one more from a Rider essay on gratitude (sorry, don't have the exact cite right now):

Quote from Rider

There is also a proper measure for parsimony [*en leptotēti*], and he who does not reason it out is just as badly off as he who goes wrong by total neglect of limits.

If you want to look at the definition of *λεπτότητι*:  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...y%3Dlepto%2Fths>

Interesting enough from the definition, Epicurus also used the word to describe the *eidola*/images.

The "thinness, meagreness of the body" citation in the definition is to Plato's *Laws* which gives some credence to seeing the word used as poverty, etc. See last paragraph in English here:  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...b&lang=original>

Quote from Plato, *Laws*

Athenian: And how about plunging into a bad state of body, such as leanness or ugliness or impotence? Should we be surprised if a man of his own free will ever

4) [Cassius](#) , you're bringing in the words "rigorously logical" and Epicurus's argument for pleasure as that to which everything else points is the exact opposite of that, especially in the Cicero section you quote. "Torquatus" is specifically saying Epicurus didn't need "elaborate argument"; he simply needed to point out that pleasure was the thing every living thing strives for. That is the definition of a Chief Good.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2021 at 9:42 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

4) Cassius , you're bringing in the words "rigorously logical" and Epicurus's argument for pleasure as that to which everything else points is the exact opposite of that, especially in the Cicero section you quote. "Torquatus" is specifically saying Epicurus didn't need "elaborate argument"; he simply needed to point out that pleasure was the thing every living thing strives for. That is the definition of a Chief Good.

Yes I realize that what you are saying is inherent in this discussion. Torquatus is saying that Epicurus didn't need that but Torquatus is specifically saying also that he (Torquatus) disagreed and thought the elaborate argument was a good idea. That contradiction seems to be what we are talking about and deciding how to wrestle with. My way of resolving it (at least for the moment) is to take the problem as contextual and saying "sometimes you do argue that way, and sometimes you don't." My preference is not to argue that way, and I think that's the best approach and the ultimate way to resolve the issue, but I can't deny that lots of very educated Epicureans seemed to think that there was a time and a place for everything -- if only to illustrate that logic can't ultimately resolve the issue.

In other words there may be better ways to say it but "it's rigorously logical to emphasize that logic cannot resolve the question." -- because we have previously defined the limits of logic and that it is insufficient.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 20, 2021 at 9:58 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Torquatus is saying that Epicurus didn't need that but Torquatus is specifically saying also that he (Torquatus) disagreed and thought the elaborate argument was a good idea

Exactly. And, frankly, I don't care if "Torquatus" thinks pleasure needs an elaborate logical argument. And I'm using " " to emphasize this isn't an Epicurean speaking, that is Cicero using the character of "Torquatus" to present Cicero's perspective/interpretation of the Epicurean position.

"Torquatus" lays out Epicurus's "pointing" in that section you quote. That's not an elaborate logical argument in your quoted section. That's Epicurus saying, look at nature!

When "Torquatus" is saying "logical method of procedure" all he's saying is it's logical for me to start by pointing out Epicurus's argument for why pleasure is the Chief Good... And he goes on to show how Epicurus pointed to why pleasure is the Chief Good.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2021 at 10:05 AM**

For the time being I am still considering how to analyze Torquatus and whether that section is Cicero slanting the argument or is in fact an accurate summary of the Epicurean material that Cicero was supposedly copying from for his own book.

I tend to think "both" -- I tend to think that this was the way that Cicero thought, but I also think it's the way that the later Epicureans were drifting in response to Stoicism. Something similar is cited in Laertius about the other Epicureans having a "fourth" leg of the canon, so it appears to me that by the time of Cicero there were in fact important divisions within the Epicureans.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 20, 2021 at 10:21 AM**

Oh, I agree. Later Epicureans felt the need to combat their rivals on their turf using their weapons of logic, etc.

But that section you quote is not that. It's Epicurus pointing out that (emphasis added)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature's own unbiased and honest verdict. Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2021 at 10:29 AM**

Yes I agree that seems to have been Epicurus' position, although even there we have to dig down into the words.

When it says that Epicurus refused to admit any NECESSITY to argue or discuss it, does that mean that he refused to do so in all contexts, or simply said that it's not \*necessary\* to do that, but on occasion I will anyway when dealing with particular people? I suspect that's just what it means - that he emphasized that it's not necessary, but not that it's not always unwise.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 20, 2021 at 11:18 AM**

"Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that..."

Here's the original Latin:

[itaque negat opus esse ratione neque disputatione](#),...

I think it's interesting that the exact word "necessity" is not used there. Instead, Cicero/Torquatus is using "opus" which (if you click the link for the definition) is normally "work, labor" but in the abstract sense can mean "need, necessity" I suppose "something that must be worked/labored for." So, I'm seeing that as Epicurus saying, according to this, "I refuse to put the work into making an argument (ratione) or having a discussion (disputatione) [about something that is SO self-evident] as..." "pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided'."

If students in later days wanted to do it, that was up to them to battle the Peripatetics and Stoics, but Epicurus was having none of it from my reading here.

Someone with better Latin skills than I (i.e., everyone), please feel free to weigh in!

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2021 at 11:44 AM

I've noted at least two translations of "On Ends" is out there, with the excerpt that I've usually used on the form being from Epicurus.net, but that doesn't exactly match the full book version which I have elsewhere (and at the moment can't find the name of the translator!)

### Quote

IX. First of all then, said he, I will proceed in the manner which is sanctioned by the founder of this school: I will lay down what that is which is the subject of our inquiry, and what its character is: not that I imagine that you do not know, but in order that my discourse may proceed in a systematic and orderly manner. We are inquiring, then, what is the end,—what is the extreme point of good, which, in the opinion of all philosophers, ought to be such that everything can be referred to it, but that it itself can be referred to nothing. This Epicurus places in pleasure, which he argues is the chief good, and that pain is the chief evil; and he proceeds to prove his assertion thus. He says that every animal the moment that it is born seeks for pleasure, and rejoices in it as the chief good; and rejects pain as the chief evil, and wards it off from itself as far as it can; and that it acts in this manner, without having been corrupted by anything, under the promptings of nature herself, who forms this uncorrupt and upright judgment. **Therefore, he affirms that there is no need of argument or of discussion as to why pleasure is to be sought for, and pain to be avoided.** This he thinks a matter of sense, just as much as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet; none of which propositions he thinks require to be confirmed by laboriously sought reasons, but that it is sufficient merely to state them. For that there is a difference between arguments and conclusions arrived at by ratiocination, and ordinary observations and statements:—by the first, secret and obscure principles are explained; by the second, matters which are plain and easy are brought to decision. For since, if you take away sense from a man, there is nothing left to him, it follows of necessity that what is contrary to nature, or what agrees with it, must be left to nature herself to decide. Now what does she perceive, or what does she determine on as her guide to seek or to avoid anything, except pleasure and pain? But there are some of our school who seek to carry out this doctrine with more acuteness, and who will not allow that it is sufficient that it should be decided by sense what is good and what is bad, but who assert that these points can be ascertained by intellect and reason also, and that pleasure is to be sought for on its own account, and that pain also is to be avoided for the same reason.

So I need to make some notes as to where these translations come from and get some links to the various versions on this text too.

I believe now that is YONGE - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/29247/29247-h/29247-h.html>

The Academic Questions,

Treatise De Finibus.

and

Tusculan Disputations

Of

M. T. Cicero

With

A Sketch of the Greek Philosophers Mentioned by Cicero.

Literally Translated by

C. D. Yonge, B.A.

London: George Bell and Sons

York Street

Covent Garden

Printed by William Clowes and Sons,

Stamford Street and Charing Cross.

1875

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## **Post by “Don” of August 20, 2021 at 1:34 PM**

I neglected to include the Latin that comes after that phrase:

[sentiri haec<sup>1</sup> putat](#)

Why does Epicurus say it's not necessary to argue about this? I take this to mean "this is discernible to the senses." It's self-evident. It's like discussing if fire is hot. Duh!

I find parallels in all this in the natural, necessary discussion. The necessary desires should not, according to Epicurus, require a lot of labor to procure. If they do, maybe they're not necessary. Same thing with his saying, it's not necessary for me to try and convince you. If you can't see this, you're just not looking. I shouldn't have to work at concocting convoluted arguments to make you see pleasure is the Chief Good when it's as plain to see as fire is hot.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 20, 2021 at 2:20 PM**

How's that literally and in Roman word order?

"to the senses - these - are known ? Or

"the senses - these [things] - are known?

or "the senses - these [things] - know?

I'm not sure if putat is present indicative or a passive, or whether sentiri is a plural of senses or some kind of participle or dative or other construct. There's no "ad" there for "to the senses" but those Romans seemed to drop things a lot!

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### **Post by “Don” of August 20, 2021 at 2:41 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

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sentiri according to the link is a verb, present infinitive passive "to be discerned by one's senses"?

putat is 3rd p singular present indicative active (he/Epicurus) "he believes, considers, regards..."

So ..

"He believes this to be discernible to one's senses..." liked fire being hot.