

# The Atlantic: How to Build a Happy Life, episode 1

**Post by “Don” of September 24, 2021 at 6:21 AM**

[https://youtu.be/\\_OslCXZ4ITY](https://youtu.be/_OslCXZ4ITY)

I am struck by how Epicurean this sounds! I'm thinking this is more "How to Build Eudaimonia." But the part where they talk about listening to your feelings seems to me spot on! The discussion of experiencing pain but not seeking it out. The importance of friendship. It'll be interesting where this goes, but this first episode strikes a very Epicurean tone. Part of me thinks it could go off the rails, but enjoy this one. I'm really tempted to post a comment since there's only 4 right this minute to not this.

---

**Post by “Don” of September 24, 2021 at 6:41 AM**

Here's a possible draft comment... Unless I decide to live unknown 😊

I just came across this program on Instagram (I know! Social media does good!? Shocking!) and look forward to the podcast. The thing that struck me as I watched the video was how Epicurean (capital E) it sounded. The discussion of enjoyment as pleasure. The discussion of listening to your feelings. The importance of connection and friendship. The discussion of living through pain but not seeking it out. All these are Epicurean themes. It seems to me that the the podcast could be called "How to Build Eudaimonia" to use the ancient Greek word often translated as "happiness" but having connotations of so much more: fulfillment, satisfaction, well-being, etc. Epicurus's philosophy is often characterized (erroneously from my perspective) as asceticism but he really talked about living a fully human life: using one's feelings of pleasure and pain to make conscious choices of what to pursue and what to reject; the paramount importance of friendship in leading a pleasurable life; experiencing pain in the moment to experience something pleasurable in the long-run (my go-to example is exercise but it could go much deeper). I found myself nodding my head in agreement from an Epicurean perspective with almost everything you both talked about. Well done presentation, lots to dig into, and excited to see where your take the podcast.

(Revised text. Comments welcomed)

---

**Post by “Don” of September 24, 2021 at 7:58 AM**

I've thought a good title for an Epicurean podcast or other forum/format would be:

"Pleasure is not a Four-Letter Word"

---

### Post by "Cassius" of September 24, 2021 at 8:35 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

"Pleasure is not a Four-Letter Word"

You're right - very good!

---

### Post by "Cassius" of September 24, 2021 at 8:56 AM

I agree that is a good location to find some people who are on the same wavelength, and that comment looks great you drafted. Here's my preliminary diagnosis for your comment "Part of me thinks it could go off the rails....."

This line of reasoning below is what we are seeing over and over. The vast majority of people want to be "happy" but at the same time they don't want to give up their view of "meaningfulness" (which they see as being living consistent with their personal view of "virtue).

And so not only are they not really following Epicurus' lead, but they implicitly denounce him directly, by alleging that setting happiness as the goal of life is a "recipe for disaster." No matter we look at the texts about "pleasure" or about "happiness" one or the other is clearly the goal that Epicurus sets out as the correct one.

It seems pretty clear to me that this is the old central question of "politics." People do in fact (and should have!) have their own ideas of what a meaningful life should be, because their views of the "should" question do in fact bring them happiness.

But what they can't easily accept is that other people may (and do! and should!) have different views of what makes them happy. So these people who are examining the issue decide that they can't admit that happiness itself is the goal, but that **their own view of happiness** must be the goal. They aren't identifying happiness as a feeling which everyone has in somewhat different ways



And part of the reason for that is that they insist on focusing on the higher-level concept of "happiness" rather than PLEASURE which is a feeling, and they deny that the core of happiness is feeling:



I haven't watch most of the video so I am sure there are other aspects to it that are relevant to this, but I suspect a lot of the way these videos focused on "how to be happy" depart from Epicurean principles is along these lines.

They are in fact falling for the old old issue of looking for "virtue" and they are denying the essential nature of happiness as being based on the feeling of pleasure. That leads them down the road to stoicism, but they can't embrace the core of stoicism either, so that look for some kind of hybrid that really strips the core meaning out of both. The end up much closer to stoicism than to Epicurus, because in the end Stoicism is just an elaborate manipulation game that seeks to persuade people that there's a god-based universe in which there's a single best way of life for everyone - and of course that single way just happens to be the one they approve of.

I wouldn't be surprised if there's not a lot more important material in this video so f people watch the whole thing please comment.

---

**Post by "Kalosyni" of September 25, 2021 at 9:17 PM**

I started watching just a bit of it...and had some ideas to share...Brooks says happiness is not a feeling...but then goes on to say it is enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose...and then they both reframe "pleasure" as "enjoyment" (they might think pleasure maybe is too animalistic? ...but pleasure is in the body whereas enjoyment is in the mind).

Since I don't know yet how he goes on to define each of those... but have some thought come up... would say there might be something to "happiness" having several components. And possibly satisfaction is a mental story that you tell yourself after the pleasurable event is over. As for purpose I think that is really the human connection aspect of life. And yet there are ideas in current society that you "should" accomplish something in your (as well as the idea that progress occurs). But for an Epicurean... a purpose = to share in pleasurable experiences with others? Because pleasure is usually more pleasurable when shared and enjoyed together with others.

Anyway I may or may not watch the rest of this video...though curious how it all gets defined.

I am now remembering the Berkeley "Science of Happiness" online class (I took a few years ago). Which was very good, but was unable to implement some aspects.

[The Science of Happiness Course](#)