

# A Debate About Hedonism

Post by "Cassius" of January 13, 2018 at 3:35 PM

Epicureans advise both short and long view.

The best of both. Justice, honesty and courage are useful to us.

"...but it does not follow that every pleasure is worthy of being chosen, just as every pain is an evil, and yet every pain must not be avoided... we resolve all these matters by measuring and reasoning whether the ultimate result is suitable or unsuitable to bringing about a happy life..."

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**Hiram Crespo***Group Admin* Did you email them about this error? Even many Cyrenaics took both the long and short view.[1](#)

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Alexander Rios or type unknown

**Alexander Rios***Group Admin* No I did not email them...yet.

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Hiram Crespo or type unknown

**Hiram Crespo***Group Admin* I read it, thought it mentioned Epicureans directly, but it doesn't ... well, the take-away then is that perhaps we ARE eudaimonic, or we are both, or that these labels are somewhat empty or at least not mutually contradictory as they're made out to sound here.[1](#)

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Cassius Amicus or type unknown

**Cassius Amicus***Group Admin* I would go with "empty" or at best "ambiguous" [1f609.png](#)



[Ross Ragsdale](#) type unknown

**Ross Ragsdale** I see no point in saying hedonism vs eudaimonism. Maybe certain versions of eudaimonism are incompatible with Epicureanism, but regardless both seek happiness as the end goal for life. They merely disagree on what constitutes happiness and blessedness.[1](#)

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[Cassius Amicus](#) type unknown

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** And the post says HEDONISM, it does not say EPICUREANISM. I do not believe the two terms were, or are now, equivalent. Who knows what "hedonism" really is, as there is no way to have an accepted definition? Therefore how can the post be right or wrong? On the other hand, Epicureanism (whether or not we like the ism) actually means something specific.

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** "They merely disagree on what constitutes happiness and blessedness." I would put that word MERELY in square quotes, because I would argue the difference is VERY large as between Aristotle (who most link to eudaimonism as that word is used today) and the goals of Epicurus.

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[Ross Ragsdale](#)

**Ross Ragsdale** As I said, certain forms of eudaemonism are incompatible with Epicureanism.

[1f642.png](#) [?1](#) type unknown

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** and this too "but regardless both seek happiness as the end goal for life" has the same openness to ambiguity [1f609.png](#) 😊 What is happiness? Why didn't our friend Jefferson say "pursuit of PLEASURE rather than happiness?" [1f609.png](#) 😊 [1](#)

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Ross Ragsdale

**Ross Ragsdale** [Cassius Amicus](#) there are many ingredients to happiness. As you know, for some their immediate connotation of pleasure rests at the level of sensuality and others pleasure involves developing one's talents and and acquiring virtue. For this reason I believe he chose the more general word, Happiness, rather than pleasure. There's no need to reject sensual pleasure a priori, but it's an empirical question to ask what constitutes unalloyed joy/pleasure/happiness. We could argue semantics until we're blue in the face, but I don't see the point.

For me, happiness is tranquility/peace of mind, or at least it's an indispensable ingredient. Developing one's talents and abilities, whether they be mental, emotional, or physical, constitutes another ingredient. What helps me the most in being happy is learning more about the natural world, the human body, philosophy, religion, and public health.

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Ross Ragsdale

**Ross Ragsdale** And, as far as the happiness of others goes...to each his/her own, within reason.

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Cassius Amicus

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** To most ordinary people who have not been corrupted by philosophical error, and for those who can give no further definition of the word as constituting the pleasures that are being experienced without interruption, the word "tranquility" is an empty, deceptive, and void of meaning as any word out of the mouth of Socrates or Plato. That is NOT what Epicurus taught - he taught "pleasure" as ordinarily understood as the goal of life. Stopping analysis at the word "tranquility" is a corruption of Epicurean philosophy that is so widespread because it is so successful.

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Ross Ragsdale

**Ross Ragsdale** [Cassius Amicus](#) how is tranquility an empty word?

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** "Tranquility" tells you nothing other than "absence of disturbance." What is it that you are doing -- what real sensible mental and physical pleasures - are you experiencing while you are not being disturbed? If you want to say books, music, art, even contemplation, all of that is fine, but those are ordinary normal understandable sensible PLEASURES.

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** And Ross I am not trying to play word games, nor am i accusing you personally of anything wrong 1f609.png 🤔 What I am saying is that "Tranquilism" has become the rallying cry of the stoic interpretation of Epicurus because it implies that Epicurus did not advise pursuing the pleasures of joy and desire, which he clearly did. A particular good reference coming:

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** THIS is the Epicurean statement of the best life possible, toward which we all should strive to the best of our capability, from Torquatus /On Ends: ""The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain. What possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain. He will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.""

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Cassius Amicus

**Cassius AmicusGroup Admin** THAT is what Tranquility in Epicurean terms mean - experiencing without disturbance "A life of tranquility crammed full of pleasure." (Cicero, In Pisonem, referring to an Epicurean)

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Ross Ragsdale

**Ross Ragsdale** [Cassius Amicus](#) the speaker said "imagine." Therefore, this is open to the same criticism that epicureans rightly give to those who offer hypothetical so called ethical "dilemmas."

The speaker says both body and mind. Undisturbed as far as I'm concerned is means tranquility. A lack of mental or physical distress and pain, coupled with satiation of necessities and natural desires.

I've yet to encounter "Epicurus the Stoic." "Tranquilism" as you say merely says that there is a lack of disturbance, which permits enjoying the life of the mind as well as the life of the body. I've yet to see or read of what you think "tranquilism" implies. The mind is to blame for misjudging what the eye sees, and so I consider it the fault of the reader if they draw stoic doctrines from Epicurean ideas.

They are pleasing activities, therefore they are ingredients to happiness.

For nearly 1/2 the day we've gone back and forth about happiness vs pleasure... even though you say that you don't want to play word games.

That being said, I primarily look to the letter of menoeceus and the pds for judging what Epicurus thought, and I look to modern and present day interpreters to see what Epicureanism has to offer the individual and the world.

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Cassius Amicus

**Cassius Amicus** " I've yet to see or read of what you think "tranquilism" implies" == That is because it implies NOTHING! IT is necessary for the hearer of the word to supply the missing positive definition. And I submit to you, when any normal non-Platonic mortal attempts to do that, results in nothing more than a list of ordinary pleasures. So the entire exercise is an attempt to convince people that some other word, or concept, other than pleasure is the goal of life, when in fact it is not. If you can define it without listing pleasures, please by all means do

so!

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** "That being said, I primarily look to the letter of menoeceus and the pds for judging what Epicurus thought, and I look to modern and present day interpreters to see what Epicureanism has to offer the individual and the world." That's entirely appropriate Ross, and that is what everyone should do. Everyone should listen to all arguments, ask questions for themselves, and decide. And I am satisfied simply to encourage people to start taking a hard look at what Tranquility really means. 1f642.png 😊

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Cassius Amicus

*Write a reply...*

Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** From Torquatus in On Ends, see final phrase/sentence: ""If, then, even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on pleasure, whereas pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good, and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.""

translation is from H. Rackham's Loeb Classical Library Edition of 1914.[1](#)

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Ross Ragsdale

**[Ross Ragsdale](#)** I'm still waiting for your point... [Cassius Amicus](#). You asked me what is happiness and said it was vague, now I return the question. What pleasure does the speaker torquatus discuss? Is it immediate and kinetic, or is it static?

To repeat...what's the point in arguing over semantics...?

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** Not semantics!!!!!! Epicurus stands far from Aristotle in focusing on pleasure.

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Ross Ragsdale Profile picture type unknown

**[Ross Ragsdale](#)** [Cassius Amicus](#) you're the one who mentioned Aristotle...

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** I totally disagree with attempting to pigeonhole pleasure into those categories for the reasons states by the article in our files section by NB.

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Ross Ragsdale

**[Ross Ragsdale](#)** [Cassius Amicus](#) so do I.

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** Pleasure comes in many different forms both physical and mental, with mental being more intense in many cases, but not more "noble" or "worthy"

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Ross Ragsdale

**[Ross Ragsdale](#)** [Cassius Amicus](#) worthy or choice-worthy ?

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Cassius Amicus

*Write a reply...*

Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** This may seem unrelated but this discussion calls this to mind. I do not believe Epicurus would agree that " the unexamined life is not worth living."

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Ross Ragsdale

**[Ross Ragsdale](#)** If he did it would have to be "the \*prudent life is not worth living."

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Hiram Crespo

**[Hiram CrespoGroup Admin](#)** I do think he'd agree. One has to examine one's desires, and our categorizing of them requires introspection.[1](#)

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** Hiram I believe you cite that from DeWitt's book or some other place, do you know where it comes from?

I disagree with both PRUDENCE and "EXAMINATION" as in and of them selves required to make life worth living, which is the point under discussion. All that is required for a life to be worth living is pleasure. Prudence and examination -- Even FRIENDSHIP - are incredibly important tools, but they are only tools - not the goal

**[PD10](#)**: If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky and death and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full with pleasures from every source and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.

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49m [Cassius Amicus](#)

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** And so to relate this to Friendship, which is even more of a hot-button litmus test than wisdom or prudence, Epicurus taught

that friendship is desirable ONLY because it leads to pleasure. If Friendship did not lead to pleasure, it would not be desirable. That is the same as for analysis of **\*\*any\*\*** subject, and it is going to lead someone seriously astray to think that ANYTHING is desirable in and of itself other than pleasure.

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47m [Hiram Crespo](#)

**[Hiram Crespo](#)** [Cassius](#) the word used in L Menoecus was phronesia (prudence, sometimes translated as wisdom) when he said "the beginning and the greatest good is wisdom. Therefore wisdom is a more precious thing even than philosophy ; from it spring all the other virtues". This does not mean that prudence is THE END, in fact the doctrine on the end is clearly stated in our sources including Menoecus. That pleasure is the end does not imply that we need to bash the means. There's a logic, a science, and a method considered valued for living pleasantly, and it's impossible to study it without learning the value of the efficient means. I don't think it's fair to confuse this issue for the sake of stressing the end being pleasure, which is an established doctrine and no one is questioning it, and the quote does not say "prudence is the end".

I say this because I remember Philodemus saying that a youth who has had no time to study philosophy did not have the chance to live pleasantly, so I remember there being requisites for a life of pleasure, and these requisites being very important to study according to the sources.

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

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[Cassius Amicus](#)

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** Part of the connection is the Aristotelian insistence on wisdom and other "virtues/goods" in addition to pleasure, as if anything other than pleasure is intrinsically desirable other than pleasure. Nothing is, so the position and all variations of it are

false. It is not examining a life that makes it worth living, but pleasure. A life that is worthwhile to its owner can be lived in the jungles of Africa as well as in the jungles of New York or the jungles of a college philosophy department, and less frequently in the latter.

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1h Alexander Rios

**Alexander Rios***Group Admin* The problem is that their definition of pleasure is not the same as the Epicurean definition. Every thing that brings gratification is a pleasure. But they're not using that definition.[1](#)

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1h Cassius Amicus

**Cassius Amicus***Group Admin* And so it is impossible to talk to such people without first correcting their definition. To accept their definition is to accept their premises and make it impossible to clarify the real point.

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Alexander Rios


**Alexander Rios***Group Admin* Or maybe you could mix it up and use words like enjoyment, and suffering, since folks don't perceive those as being so ephemeral.[1](#)

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Cassius Amicus

**Cassius Amicus***Group Admin* Definitely Alex. "Pleasure" has been tainted and that's why even Jefferson couldn't use it in the place it should have been used. I definitely believe in diplomacy and in good marketing. But always with the goal in mind and when we can push people to improve, we should. We aren't ever going to the majority in any place in our lifetime outside of maybe a small conference hall if we have a get-together  But we can't let the outsiders have their way when they try to box us in by calling the goal of life unacceptable.

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Cassius Amicus

*Write a reply...*

Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** There are many people who like to focus on "commercialism" as the demon of the modern world. In terms of teaching people to chase after impossible, false, and damaging goals, commercialism does not hold a candle to college philosophy and religion departments.

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1hAlexander Rios

**[Alexander RiosGroup Admin](#)** Commercialism often produces vain desires. Empty desires. The Epicurean vocabulary is even more clear.

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** Absolutely it does. But it is in a very rough sense "pleasure." What does the pursuit of "virtue" of and for itself produce? A corruption of philosophy and the goal of life, which, if fully accepted, renders it impossible to correct course, because it convinces people that pleasure is a sin, not the goal of life. Commercialism at least does not do that.

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53mCassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** Here's another way of looking at this. Commercialism is definitely not good, definitely damaging, and I am not defending it. But someone who falls victim to thinking that a happy life comes from spending money will sooner or later (probably sooner) find out that spending money does not give him all of the OTHER pleasures in life (music, art, family, friends, ad infinitum) that he will not get unless he puts spending money aside. No pleasure can be pursued singly - surfing 24/7 is not sustainable because one also

needs food, water, shelter, sex, etc.

So someone who falls prey to commercialism is going to find out on his own, and fairly quickly, that he has made a mistake, and go looking for those other pleasures which make for a full life.

But a person who is corrupted by a false religion of philosophy to think that pleasure should not be pursued has a cancer that will eat him alive with no hope of recovery. The person who is convinced that pleasure is evil will shun pleasure, and look to greater and greater asceticism, and find nothing but emptiness. And his training in false philosophy and religion will prevent him from ever challenging his original premise that pleasure is bad.

That is far worse, and far harder from which to recover, than the mistake of thinking that buying trinkets and a new I-phone is the path to happiness.

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Cassius Amicus

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Cassius Amicus

**[Cassius AmicusGroup Admin](#)** This is an incredibly good thread. Thank you as always Alex!

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Cassius Amicus

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