

# Epicurus' Hierarchy of Needs

**Post by “Rolf” of June 2, 2025 at 11:48 AM**

Hey folks,

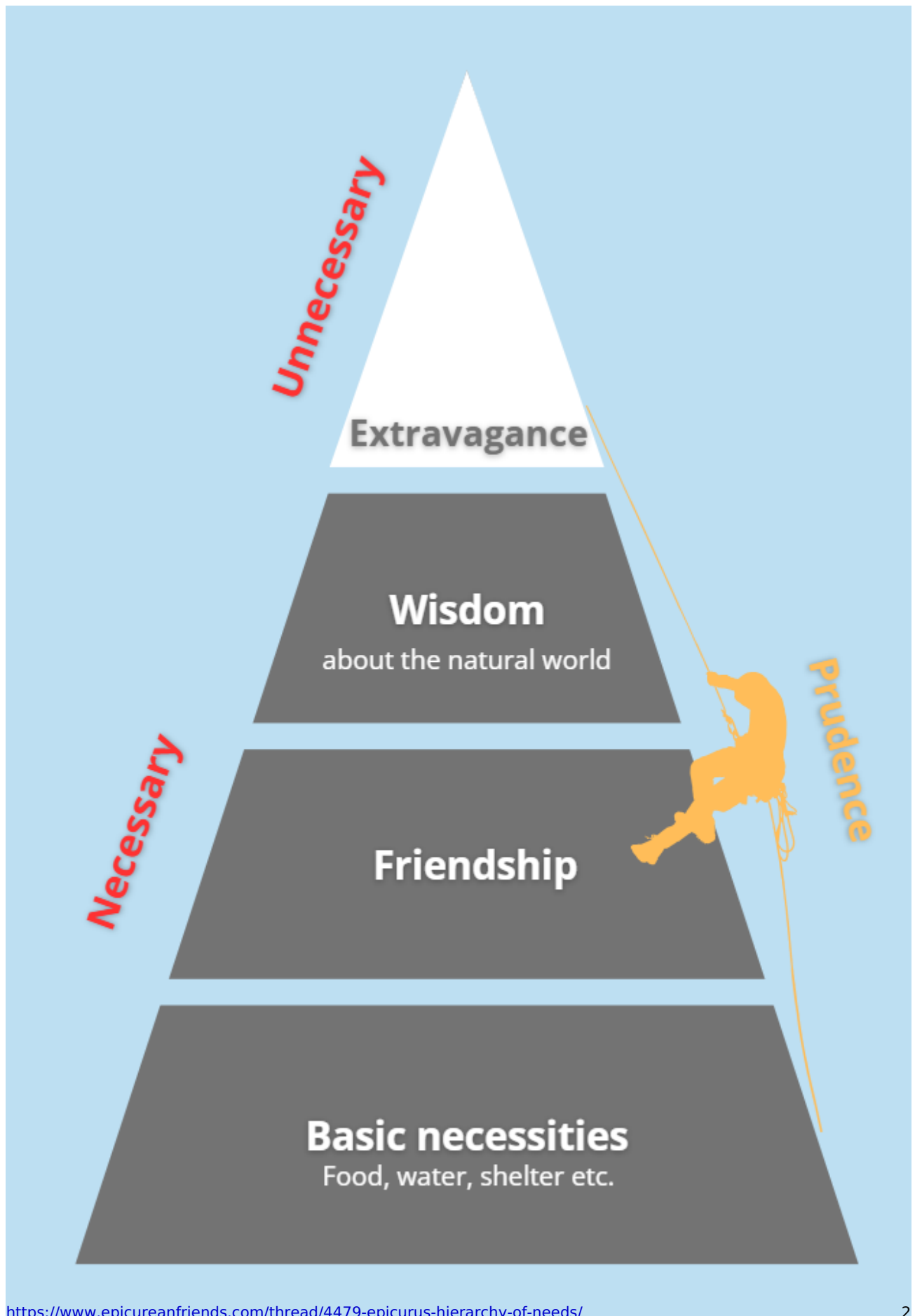
Woke up feeling a little under the weather today. While resting up in bed, I thought about Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how it does and does not relate to Epicurean philosophy. As a result, I decided to throw together this rough idea for an Epicurean hierarchy of needs.

Now, obviously in Epicurean philosophy there isn't so much of a "hierarchy" in the sense that all pleasure is good. With that in mind, this chart is meant for more practical usage.

From bottom to top:

1. First and foremost, we need basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter, along with confidence of consistent access to these things. Without these, we physically cannot live.
2. Next, we need friendship and a community. Humans are social animals and friendship is vital to a pleasant life.
3. Then we learn about Epicurean philosophy, such as the ethics and canonic, and the natural world, so that we may live a more pleasurable life and understand the limits of pleasure.
4. Finally, we have the snow sprinkled atop the mountain representing the natural but unnecessary "extravagant" desires. Once we have everything below, we may take joy in these pleasures and allow them to adorn our life, without feeling like we require them.

The mountain climber represents prudence - the tool we use in order to ascend the mountain.



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**Post by “Kalosyni” of June 2, 2025 at 7:23 PM**

[Quote from Rolf](#)

Finally, we have the snow sprinkled atop the mountain representing the natural but unnecessary "extravagant" desires. Once we have everything below, we may take joy in these pleasures and allow them to adorn our life, without feeling like we require them.

I personally would end up choosing a word other than "extravagant" (but not sure exactly what word).

Also, I wouldn't see this as a hierarchy, but instead that they can all occur at the same time.

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**Post by “Don” of June 2, 2025 at 7:29 PM**

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

can all occur at the same time.

Pillars? Holding up... Something?

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**Post by “Rolf” of June 2, 2025 at 7:56 PM**

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Rolf](#)

Finally, we have the snow sprinkled atop the mountain representing the natural but unnecessary "extravagant" desires. Once we have everything below, we may take joy in these pleasures and allow them to adorn our life, without feeling like we require them.

I personally would end up choosing a word other than "extravagant" (but not sure exactly what word).

Also, I wouldn't see this as a hierarchy, but instead that they can all occur at the same time.

I use the word "extravagant" as it's the word Emily Austin uses in her book to describe natural but unnecessary desires. I agree it's not the perfect word though - if I recall correctly, Austin doesn't think it is either.

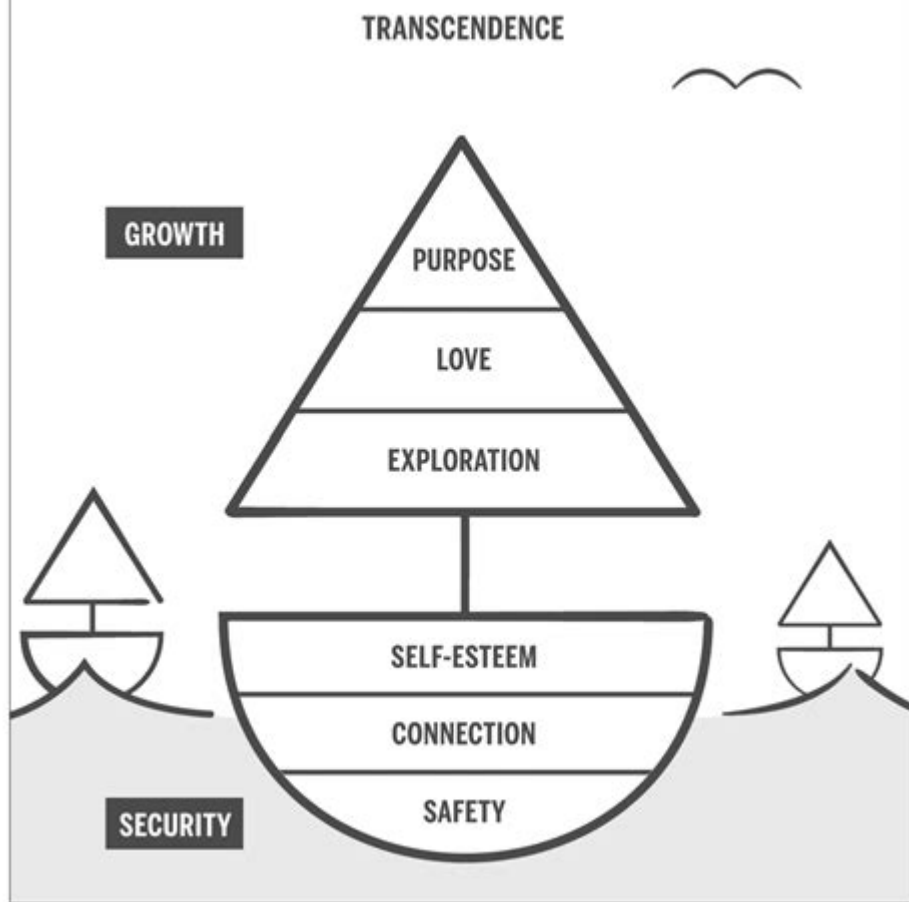
Perhaps not a hierarchy in the sense of some things being better than others, but in the sense of priority. Maslow's hierarchy of needs places self-esteem above safety and security - this doesn't mean that self-esteem is more important than safety, however. And in the same way, it's obviously possible for one to have both self-esteem and safety simultaneously. It's less about a ranking, and more about ordering needs from basic to complex, and thus giving us some kind of roadmap.

That said, this is more of a visual representation than an actual theory.

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### **Post by "Lowri834" of June 2, 2025 at 8:43 PM**

This is an alternative to the triangle format for Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maybe Basic Necessities, Friendship, Prudence or specific items from canon in the boat and the sail or multiple sails could be other aspects.



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**Post by “Don” of June 2, 2025 at 10:40 PM**

[Quote from Rolf](#)

I use the word "extravagant" as it's the word Emily Austin uses in her book to describe natural but unnecessary desires. I agree it's not the perfect word though - if I recall correctly, Austin doesn't think it is either.

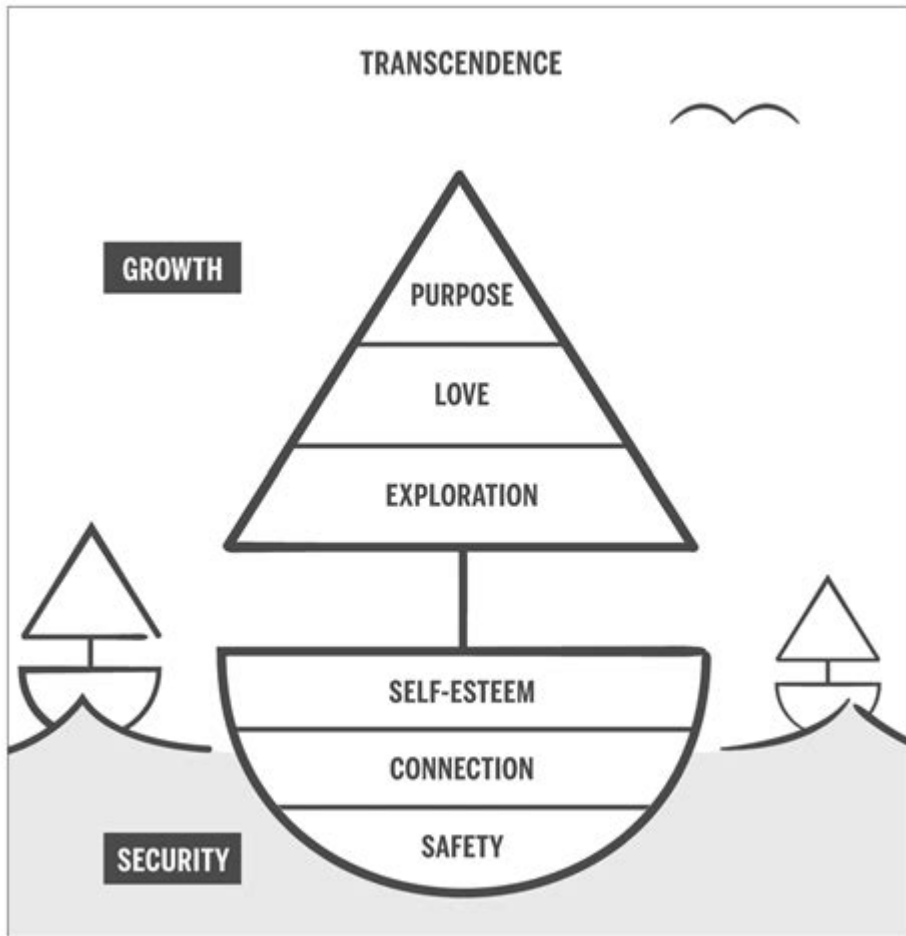
Agreed. It's not perfect by any means, but I remember Dr. Austin saying in our interview episodes that there was NO WAY her editors were going to let her use "natural and necessary" and "natural but no necessary" over and over again the book 😊 She had to come up with something.

I also don't think it's perfect, but I like the idea that the word conveys that there is *nothing* wrong with enjoying things "above and beyond" what are considered necessities.

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**Post by "Don" of June 2, 2025 at 10:47 PM**

Quote from Louri924



of Needs. Maybe  
in the boat and

I like the little boat idea/metaphor, especially in light of παιδείαν δὲ πᾶσαν, μακάριε, φεύγε τὰ κάτιον ἀράμενος : Set sail in your own little boat, blessed one, free from all indoctrination. ( [Usener 163](#)) τὰ κάτιον (takation) literally means a light boat, the diminutive of ἄκατος (akatos).

The [acatium](#) (ἀκάτιον) was especially adapted for fast sailing with light winds.

That said, I'm not sure how to label the parts. I wouldn't advocate for necessary, natural, unnecessary because those are classifications of desires. Maybe Prudence is the sail which steers the ship? I'll have to think on that.

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### **Post by “Rolf” of June 3, 2025 at 6:36 AM**

You know, this has me thinking: At least for those of us who are already familiar with the philosophy, using the abbreviations NN, NU, and UU would be a lot cleaner and clearer. 🤔

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 3, 2025 at 6:55 AM**

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

I also don't think it's perfect, but I like the idea that the word conveys that there is nothing wrong with enjoying things "above and beyond" what are considered necessities.

You think so? I would have said that "extravagant" carries strong negative connotations.

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### **Post by “Don” of June 3, 2025 at 7:02 AM**

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

You know, this has me thinking: At least for those of us who are already familiar with the philosophy, using the abbreviations NN, NU, and UU would be a lot cleaner and clearer. 🤔

I can appreciate your desire for conciseness, but I'm not a fan of in-group abbreviations. I don't even like referring to Epicurean philosophy as EP. I would also offer that the term

"unnecessary" doesn't actually in at least one exposition of the categories of desires, that in the letter to Menoikeus:

#### Quote

Furthermore, on the one hand, there are the natural desires; on the other, the 'empty, fruitless, or vain ones.' And of the natural ones, on the one hand, are the necessary ones; on the other, the ones which are only natural; then, of the necessary ones: on the one hand, those necessary for eudaimonia; then, those necessary for the freedom from disturbance for the body; then those necessary for life itself. *(This is my own literal translation)*

In this categorization, Epicurus is only concerned with natural (φυσικὰ), necessary (ἀναγκαῖαι), and empty (κενά) categories. I would still contend that those "necessary for life itself" are those essentials at the base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: food, water, shelter, sleep, air, etc.

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### Post by “Don” of June 3, 2025 at 7:14 AM

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

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

I also don't think it's perfect, but I like the idea that the word conveys that there is nothing wrong with enjoying things "above and beyond" what are considered necessities.

You think so? I would have said that "extravagant" carries strong negative connotations.

One of the reasons I'm fine with Dr. Austin's decision is that it takes back or reclaims that "negative connotation" and turns it on its head. That negative connotation of "extravagant" strikes me as potentially Puritanical. IF "extravagant" desires do no harm to the person or anyone else and IF they do not pose an undue burden to acquire or fulfill, why not indulge in them? Extravagant, indulgent, why not? One definition of the word is "excessive, going beyond a *normal* or *acceptable* limit in degree or amount." (my emphasis added) "Acceptable" to whom? Someone else telling you you're living extravagantly? Mind your own business 😊 Now, do I think there's something to the idea of "conspicuous consumption"? "the spending of money on and the acquiring of luxury commodities (goods and services) *specifically as a public display of economic power*—the income and the accumulated wealth—of

the buyer. " ([Wikipedia](#)) Now, in the Austin context, I would not call that "extravagant." I would call that trying to fulfill an empty desire. But if something brings you pleasure and meets the criteria of no harm/no undue burden to acquire, I don't think Epicurus opposes that "extravagance."

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### **Post by "Rolf" of June 3, 2025 at 7:31 AM**

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

I can appreciate your desire for conciseness, but I'm not a fan of in-group abbreviations. I don't even like referring to Epicurean philosophy as EP.

That's fair Don - I can see how it could be a bit exclusionary for anyone outside the loop.

The passage from Menoikeus you bring up is interesting. Would you say "natural", "necessary", and "empty" are suitable terms to use?

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### **Post by "Don" of June 3, 2025 at 7:57 AM**

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

Would you say "natural", "necessary", and "empty" are suitable terms to use?

Well, if it was good enough for Epicurus... 😊

PS. Okay, let me add that "Yes, I know Epicurus didn't use "natural", "necessary", and "empty" because he spoke Greek." But those translations are about as close to literal as one gets for φυσικαί, ἀναγκαῖαι, and κεναί.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of June 3, 2025 at 8:31 AM**

I'd say that in the case of both empty and extravagant, you've got good examples of the problems involved in making clear what it is you are really saying. You definitely want the closest single word you can find, but even then I doubt you can avoid explaining or giving examples. And in Lucretius' case especially, as well as probably Epicurus, at least in regard to atoms, it seems like they regularly close to use a string of close synonyms (or repeating the same thing in different ways) as a method of giving clarity to what they were trying to convey.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2025 at 8:53 AM

### [Quote from Don](#)

it takes back or reclaims that "negative connotation" and turns it on its head. That negative connotation of "extravagant" strikes me as potentially Puritanical.

I personally feel that "extravagant" still ends up keeping the Puritanical connotation, and seems to convey that you "should" only indulge very rarely.

### [Quote from Don](#)

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

Would you say “natural”, “necessary”, and “empty” are suitable terms to use?

Well, if it was good enough for Epicurus... 😊

PS. Okay, let me add that "Yes, I know Epicurus didn't use “natural”, “necessary”, and “empty” because he spoke Greek." But those translations are about as close to literal as one gets for φυσικαί, ἀναγκαῖαι, and κεναί.

I like this idea of only: "natural, necessary, and empty".

We could think about it this way:

- natural = Is it natural? Does it come to us from nature? (We will need to be clear about what exactly are all the desires that nature gives to us).
- necessary = Do we need it to survive? Do we need it for our well-being (and to feel blessed/happy).
- empty = Is it actually unnecessary for both survival and well-being? Is it an opinion not from nature but generated by greed for massive riches, non-stop variations of sensation,

massive power/control/status (all of which are empty opinions).

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2025 at 8:56 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I like this idea of only: "natural, necessary, and empty".

Actually it should just be:

--- natural and necessary = Is it natural? Does it come to us from nature? (We will need to be clear about what exactly are all the desires that nature gives to us). And... Do we need it to survive? Do we need it for our well-being (and to feel blessed/happy).

**-vs-**

--- empty = Is it actually unnecessary for both survival and well-being? Is it an opinion not from nature but generated by greed for massive riches, non-stop variations of sensation, massive power/control/status (all of which are empty opinions).

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### Post by “Rolf” of June 3, 2025 at 9:12 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I like this idea of only: "natural, necessary, and empty".

Actually it should just be:

--- natural and necessary = Is it natural? Does it come to us from nature? (We will need to be clear about what exactly are all the desires that nature gives to us). And... Do we need it to survive? Do we need it for our well-being (and to feel blessed/happy).

**-vs-**

--- empty = Is it actually unnecessary for both survival and well-being? Is it an opinion not from nature but generated by greed for massive riches, non-stop variations of sensation, massive power/control/status (all of which are empty opinions).

What about the desires that are natural but not strictly necessary for survival and well-being?

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### **Post by “Rolf” of June 3, 2025 at 9:19 AM**

How does the word "luxurious/luxuries" instead of "extravagant/extravagances" sound? Food is a necessary desire; ice cream is luxurious. Friendship is necessary for happiness; romance is a luxury.

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

even then I doubt you can avoid explaining or giving examples

That said, I agree with this. No word or term is going to be able to fully put across the meaning that Epicurus intended by itself - but that's okay. For me, a term is more for my own use and understanding, and for reference in discussion with others who are familiar with Epicurean philosophy. For those who are not familiar, we must of course explain what we mean, just as we must often first explain what we mean by "pleasure". I'm still partial to using the NN, NU, UU abbreviations for internal discussions, simply because they're relatively neutral and clear if you know what they stand for.

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### **Post by “Rolf” of June 3, 2025 at 9:22 AM**

Going back to the initial topic for a moment: I might add clouds in the sky above the mountain representing UU/empty/corrosive desires - no matter how much you climb, you will never reach them, and thus chasing them is imprudent.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 3, 2025 at 9:27 AM**

### [Quote from Rolf](#)

Food is a necessary desire; ice cream is luxurious.

Are we buying into the enemies' conclusions by using their terminology (such as extravagant)?"

What are we really talking about, from an Epicurean point of view?

What is Epicurus saying here as to luxury:

[130] Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good. 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 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.

"Luxury" carries some of the same negative connotation today, but whatever the Greek is, it is a word Epicurus used.

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### **Post by “Rolf” of June 3, 2025 at 9:32 AM**

Decided to look up some definitions on my beloved Wiktionary and found something interesting.

The third definition of the word "luxury" is given as: *"Something that is pleasant but not necessary in life."*

This seems to fit perfectly with the Epicurean view of desires that are natural but unnecessary.

On the other hand, the definitions given for the word "extravagance" are markedly anti-Epicurean, aligning more closely with empty/corrosive desires, such as "excessive" and "prodigality".

I realise that dictionary definitions rarely represent concrete, objective meanings, but perhaps they can be useful in pointing us towards how words are most commonly used and interpreted.

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2025 at 9:36 AM**

### [Quote from Rolf](#)

What about the desires that are natural but not strictly necessary for survival and well-being?

I would now say that it is best in our modern times to not have "natural/unnecessary" as a category. And that also means discarding the labels of "luxury" and "extravagant". Our current civilization makes it easy and affordable to attain many "luxuries" and many "extravagances".

You can eat all the ice cream that you want (but just see what happens, lol...because the stomach can't take unlimited ice-cream and you'll get a tummy-ache). If you can easily find and afford to buy ice-cream and it causes you no pain, then it leads to pleasure. But if you are lactose intolerant or diabetic, then ice-cream would be "empty" of pleasure/well-being for you.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 3, 2025 at 9:45 AM**

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Our current civilization makes it easy and affordable to attain many "luxuries" and many "extravagances".

But do not there remain very many desires that are not easy and not affordable to attain, and which we would go on pursuing forever without limit if we did not identify their nature as such?

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2025 at 9:54 AM**

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

But do not there remain very many desires that are not easy and not affordable to attain, and which we would go on pursuing forever without limit if we did not identify their nature as such?

The things that are not easy and not affordable are also "empty", such that they come about from a desire for status or control (a futile attempt at controlling circumstances to make them "perfect" in some way (perfectly beautiful, perfectly safe).

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2025 at 10:00 AM

Okay, regarding my "mistaken" idea in post 22 above (of only two categories)...now revising back to three, lol:

- natural/necessary = necessary for life and for well-being
- natural/unnecessary = difficult or impossible to attain, and beyond ones means or recklessly depleting ones needed resources in order to attain
- empty = greed for status/wealth/power/control/perfection/non-stop sensory variations

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## Post by “Rolf” of June 3, 2025 at 10:05 AM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Okay, regarding my "mistaken" idea in post 22 above (of only two categories)...now revising back to three, lol:

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- natural/unnecessary = difficult or impossible to attain, and beyond ones means or recklessly depleting ones needed resources in order to attain
- empty = greed for status/wealth/power/control/perfection/non-stop sensory variations

I don't know if I agree that natural/unnecessary desires are “difficult or impossible to attain”, or that they should be viewed negatively at all. From what I understand, this category simply refers to things that are pleasurable but not strictly necessary for happiness.

A can of soup and some bread will fulfil my hunger, but I won't deny myself the pleasure of a steak dinner if the opportunity arises and it doesn't cause an excess of pain.

It is painful to not have any food at all, but I am not (or should not) be caused any pain by eating soup and bread rather than a steak dinner. The way understand it: Necessary desires cause pain in their absence, unnecessary desires do not (or should not).

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2025 at 10:09 AM

Ooops, meant to type in that my "mistaken" idea of just two categories was in post 16.

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2025 at 10:18 AM

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

I don't know if I agree that natural/unnecessary desires are “difficult or impossible to attain”, or that they should be viewed negatively at all. From what I understand, this category simply refers to things that are pleasurable but not strictly necessary for happiness.

"pleasurable but not strictly necessary for happiness"... maybe the word "optional"?

And yet I see it differently, as "unnecessary for survival" - **and you only label something as natural/unnecessary when it is difficult/impossible to get or depleting/reckless to ones resources.**

Something that causes pain would go into the "empty" category (as in empty of pleasure).

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### Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2025 at 10:19 AM

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

And yet I see it differently, as "unnecessary for survival" - and you only label something as natural/unnecessary when it is difficult/impossible to get or depleting/reckless to ones resources.

Because if something is necessary for survival, then you would endure pain and struggle for the sake of attaining it.

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### Post by “Cassius” of June 3, 2025 at 10:42 AM

This is probably a good time for a reminder that the only authoritative explanation (so far as I recall at the moment - are there others?) of the natural/necessary classification (aside from the scholium in DL which is of uncertain source) is that of Torquatus in On Ends (Reid translation).

If this is accurate, and I believe it is, then the focus is simply that as to the "neither natural nor necessary" it is not possible to discover any boundary or limit."

So those that have no boundary or limit to them (live forever; world domination) are particularly dangerous and inadvisable.

But more generally, unless someone aspires to be world dictator, are not virtually all of the pleasures we are debating in the "natural but not necessary" category, and all of those questions are resolved by balancing the pleasure and pain that we expect to follow from particular choices?

#### Quote

[45] I ask what classification is either more profitable or more suited to the life of happiness than that adopted by Epicurus? He affirmed that there is one class of passions which are both natural and needful; another class which are natural without being needful ; a third class which are neither natural nor needful; and such are the conditions of these passions that the needful class are satisfied without much trouble or expenditure ; nor is it much that the natural passions crave, since nature herself makes such wealth as will satisfy her both easy of access and moderate in amount; and it is not possible to discover any boundary or limit to false passions.

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## Post by "Rolf" of June 3, 2025 at 10:55 AM

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

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And yet I see it differently, as "unnecessary for survival" - **and you only label something as natural/unnecessary when it is difficult/impossible to get or depleting/reckless to ones resources.**

Something that causes pain would go into the "empty" category (as in empty of pleasure).

I would label something natural but unnecessary if it is a natural desire (ie. Not arising from false beliefs or fears) but not strictly necessary for my happiness.

Movies are clearly not necessary for happiness or survival - countless people have been happy and healthy without them. And yet watching movies is not an inherently harmful or empty desire. In which case, what are movies other than natural but unnecessary desires?

Perhaps I'm misunderstanding you Kalosyni, and please correct me if I am, but it seems that your definition leads to an ascetic view of Epicureanism in which we should only pursue what is strictly necessary.

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### Post by "Kalosyni" of June 3, 2025 at 11:14 AM

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

Perhaps I'm misunderstanding you Kalosyni, and please correct me if I am, but it seems that your definition leads to an ascetic view of Epicureanism in which we should only pursue what is strictly necessary.

Lol, I was thinking the other way around...lol, that you Rolf were coming from an ascetic view (due to your comment about ice-cream). 😄

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

Movies are clearly not necessary for happiness or survival - countless people have been happy and healthy without them. And yet watching movies is not an inherently harmful or empty desire. In which case, what are movies other than natural but unnecessary desires?

I think that I talked about movies in another thread (but have forgotten exactly what I said, and forgotten what thread that was in). But this is a good time to talk about it again...because I would question whether or not harm might come about to an individual if they were to watch a lot of movies about people who desire and chase after great wealth, status, power, control, perfect beauty, perfect safety, or non-stop sensory variations...but it will depend on the person and the circumstances...so no absolute rules.

I wouldn't call myself ascetic...because I hold to Principal Doctrine 8 as being very important:

[PD08](#): "No pleasure is bad in itself; but the means of paying for some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures themselves."

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### **Post by "Rolf" of June 3, 2025 at 11:28 AM**

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Lol, I was thinking the other way around...lol, that you Rolf were coming from an ascetic view (due to your comment about ice-cream).

Not at all! I'm the furthest thing from ascetic and I don't believe that Epicurus was one either. Ice cream is great and can certainly make life richer and more pleasurable. That said, I think we can both agree that ice cream is not *necessary* for a pleasant life.

All I'm talking about here is the classification of desires as laid out. My disagreement stems from your statement that we "only label something as natural/unnecessary when it is difficult/impossible to get or depleting/reckless to one's resources." I don't think that something being unnecessary to happiness implies that it is always difficult or reckless to attain, and I don't think that Epicurus meant it in this way either.

#### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I think that I talked about movies in another thread (but have forgotten exactly what I said, and forgotten what thread that was in). But this is a good time to talk about it again...because I would question whether or not harm might come about to an individual if they were to watch a lot of movies about people who desire and chase after great wealth, status, power, control, perfect beauty, perfect safety, or non-stop sensory variations...but it will depend on the person and the circumstances...so no absolute rules.

Haha, I was hesitant to use movies as an example but couldn't come up with anything better in the moment - I remember that you're not a fan. The word "movies" could be replaced here by practically any pleasure that is neither inherently harmful nor necessary for happiness.

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### Post by "Kalosyni" of June 3, 2025 at 11:34 AM

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

That said, I think we can both agree that ice cream is not necessary for a pleasant life.

What!!!? Ice cream isn't necessary? (lol 😄) That's like saying sex isn't necessary! 😄

For the **most** pleasant life I would recommend both. 😄

But I think you could still be happy with vanilla yogurt and massages. 😇😄

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### Post by "Don" of June 3, 2025 at 12:27 PM

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

This is probably a good time for a reminder that the only authoritative explanation (so far as I recall at the moment - are there others?) of the natural/necessary classification (aside from the scholium in DL which is of uncertain source) is that of Torquatus in On Ends

It is in the letter to Menoikeus.

Also, Menoikeus 130:

πολυτελεῖ διαίτη "expensive/extravagant/costly/luxurious way of living"

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### Post by "sanantoniogarden" of June 3, 2025 at 6:52 PM

To the point of conciseness of the categorization of desires I simply use necessary, unnecessary and vain. I feel this is a nice brief way to remember: necessary desires are Natural, unnecessary desires are natural, and vain desires are just that, empty and unattainable.

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of June 3, 2025 at 8:03 PM**

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

This is probably a good time for a reminder that the only authoritative explanation (so far as I recall at the moment - are there others?) of the natural/necessary classification (aside from the scholium in DL which is of uncertain source) is that of Torquatus in On Ends (Reid translation).

[Cassius](#) I'm not sure that I'm reading your post #30 correctly but, for reference, here are PDs relevant to the categories of desires:

[PD26](#) *The desires that do not bring pain when they go unfulfilled are not necessary; indeed they are easy to reject if they are hard to achieve or if they seem to produce harm.*

[PD21](#) *One who perceives the limits of life knows how easy it is to expel the pain produced by a lack of something and to make one's entire life complete; so that there is no need for the things that are achieved through struggle.*

[PD29](#) *Among desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural and unnecessary, and some are unnatural and unnecessary (arising instead from groundless opinion).*

[PD30](#) *Among natural desires, those that do not bring pain when unfulfilled and that require intense exertion arise from groundless opinion; and such desires fail to be stamped out not by nature but because of the groundless opinions of humankind.*

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### **Post by “Cassius” of June 3, 2025 at 8:11 PM**

Very good point Godfrey thank you! I was thinking of narrative explanations such as the Letters, Lucretius, Philodemus etc, but I forgot the most obvious! Definitely those need to be in the mix as well, and indeed maybe there are other references in those other sources, but if they are there they don't come immediately to mind.

Update:

I see in Diogenes of Oinoanda a fragment of 39 is probably on point but doesn't add anything. Part of Fragment 2 may also be relevant, but it's stated in a somewhat different context.