

What Is The Relationship Between "Hedonic Calculus" Analysis" and "Natural and Necessary Desire" Analysis?

Post by "Cassius" of January 21, 2026 at 9:25 PM

In tonight's Zoom we went at length into the question posed in the title to this thread, but I need to explain the background. First, it appears that there is a division of opinion about whether "Hedonic Calculus" analysis is more fundamental and primary, or whether "Natural and Necessary Desire" analysis is more fundamental and primary. In other words,

1. Does one analysis come before, or override, or overrule the other?
2. Do you start with one analysis and then bring the other into play only if a possible activity "passes the test" of the other one first?

One reason this question arose is that in section 33 of Part V of Tusculan Disputations, Cicero discusses Epicurus' position on several ethical questions. Some of this review is plainly sarcasm, but much of it seems to be accurate. (And for purposes of this analysis let's refer to the LOEB/KING translation, which Bryan tells us is more accurate than the Yonge translation, as discussed in another recent thread.)

Here's the section. I think most of us will agree that except for the snide remarks implying inconsistency by Epicurus, what's stated here is actually a pretty good summary of the Epicurean position. The point of this thread is not to attack Cicero's analysis but to raise another question.

Cicero goes first to the Natural and Necessary analysis and indicates its usefulness.

Then, in the sentence that begins "The whole teaching of Epicurus about pleasure is that pleasure is, he thinks, always to be wished....."

The reason for this post is in part because this section section is almost a stand-alone / restart-from-the-beginning statement of Epicurean ethics, and Cicero doesn't really explain the linkage between what he has just given in the "natural and necessary analysis" to this new "hedonic calculus" analysis.

It was suggested at the meeting that the reason for Cicero placing natural and necessary first here is that Cicero is wanting to emphasize a more "moral" view of Epicurean pleasure as part of Cicero's own plan of arguing in favor virtue. That may or may not be the reason, or may be a part of the reason, but the way Cicero presents the order of the argument here helps highlight a question that we've talked about many times before, and takes us back to the questions

posed above:

1. Does one analysis come before, or override, or overrule the other? Does Epicurus mean for our analysis to be: "Start by asking whether desires are natural, necessary, or neither. If you can determine that a desire is neither natural nor necessary, STOP -- there is no need to ask whether it might lead to more pleasure or less pain by pursuing it."
2. If so, then the conclusion is that Epicurus teaches us to always apply first the natural/necessary test, and only consider the hedonic calculus if the proposed activity "passes the test" of the natural/necessary filter.

There was significant dissent to that position in our meeting, with some observing that if that perspective were correct, then one is not really following Epicurus if they don't understand and apply the natural / necessary filter BEFORE worrying about hedonic calculus.

Please give us your thoughts!

XXXIII. You are, I take it, aware that Epicurus has distinguished different kinds of desires, not perhaps with over-much exactness, still in a way that is of service:⁵ in part, they are, he says, natural and necessary, in part natural and not necessary, in part neither one nor the other; scarcely

anything is required to satisfy the necessary pleasures for the stores of nature are available;¹ and the second kind of desires is he thinks neither hard to satisfy nor indeed hard to go without; the third kind he thought should be utterly rejected, because they were completely meaningless, and so far from counting as necessary, had not any relation to nature either. At this point his disciples enter on a long argument, and those pleasures, which belong to kinds they despise, they belittle in detail, yet all the same look out for a plentiful supply of them.² For less pleasures upon which they dwell at length are, they say, easy to satisfy, general, within reach of all, and should nature demand them, the standard of value should, they think, not be birth, position or rank, but beauty, age, shape, and abstinence is by no means difficult at the call of either health or duty or reputation, and in general this kind of pleasures is desirable, should there be no obstacle, but is never of benefit.³ The whole teaching of Epicurus about pleasure is that pleasure it, he thinks, always to be wished and sought for in and for itself because it is pleasure, and that on the same principle pain is always to be avoided for the simple reason that it is pain, and so the wise man will employ a system of counterbalancing which enables him both to avoid pleasure, should it be likely to ensure greater pain, and submit to pain where it ensures greater pleasure; and

all pleasurable things, although judged of by the bodily senses, are notwithstanding transmitted on again to the soul;¹ and for this reason while the body feels delight for the time that it has the sensation of present pleasure, it is the soul which has both the realization of present pleasure conjointly with the body and anticipates coming pleasure, and does not suffer past pleasure to slip away: thus the wise man will always have an unbroken tissue of pleasures, as the expectation of pleasures hoped for is combined with the recollection of pleasures already realized.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 22, 2026 at 12:52 AM

I would begin with natural or unnatural, and eliminate the unnatural desires. Then I would reason out whether the resultant pleasures are likely to outweigh any pains involved. This goes along with my thinking that the natural and unnecessary desires are the sweet spot of day to day choices and avoidances. I examine these in terms of both the desires and the potential pleasures/pains, in no particular order.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 22, 2026 at 2:22 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

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I'm not sure if the labels of "natural, necessary, unnecessary, unnatural" are workable for me. I like to use more words to explore things, and here is an example:

Step 1: I notice that I feel desire for something specific: _____(xyz).

Step 2: If I get that _____ (xyz), will the result will be one of the following?

- a) relief from pain (food relieves the pain of hunger, and rest relieves the pain of exertion/work, aspirin relieves the pain of a headache).
- b) protection of long-term well-being of the body (warm clothing for winter, warm housing, exercise, healthful foods)".
- c) sufficiency/means for acquiring and maintaining basic needs.
- d) necessities that provide "good spirits" (such as friends, or other social activities such as playing an instrument or dancing, etc.) ...and enjoyment of mental experiences (learning, teaching, memory).

e) anything else that is an enjoyment of bodily sensations and which are free from painful outcomes.

Step 3: Is the thing I desire something that has "limits" or is it an "unlimited desire" (something that can't be fulfilled)? And does it have painful/stressful consequences?

-- the desires for great wealth, fame, or power are "unlimited" (and are difficult to acquire and come with stressful consequences)

-- the desire for high-fashion clothing or the perfect high-end house is "unlimited" (and these are difficult to acquire without great wealth)

-- the desire for a life filled with perfect endless romance is an "unlimited" desire (and is difficult to acquire and comes with stressful consequences)

-- the desire for eating tasty highly palatable foods all the time is an "unlimited" desire (difficult to fulfill and comes with painful consequences)

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2026 at 2:47 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I would begin with natural or unnatural, and eliminate the unnatural desires.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I'm not sure if the labels of "natural, necessary, unnecessary, unnatural" are workable for me. I like to use more words to explore things, and here is an example:

Comparing what Godfrey wrote with what Kalosyni wrote, I expect most of us are going to agree on the benefits of both methods of analysis.

The differences appear to me to come out with Godfrey's "I would begin...." because the point of division seems to be mostly the question of *where to start*.

Do you *start* with hedonic calculus analysis, or do you *start* with natural and necessary analysis?

No doubt some will want to say that *it doesn't matter* but for someone who is new to the philosophy or who just wants to be intellectually rigorous, it will matter.

In fact, a major difference came out last night, in that one view is that if we can determine that a desire is neither natural nor necessary, then there is no reason to consider evaluating that action according to the hedonic calculus. That's because it is the point of view of some that we would NEVER under any circumstances pursue a desire that is neither natural nor necessary. In our meeting last night we had specific disagreement on that.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 22, 2026 at 5:56 PM

I specifically disagree with that 😄

I rule out the unnatural desires, but find the unnecessary desires to be a source of great pleasure. The key to enjoying pleasures resulting from unnecessary desires is to realize that you can thrive without them and yet can fully enjoy them when they're readily available. For me, ruling out the unnecessary veers toward a life of asceticism.

Another thing that I find to be true, at least for me, is that what is necessary can change with changing circumstances but what is unnatural is rather consistent.

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2026 at 6:27 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I specifically disagree with that 😄

Just to be clear, "that" refers to what?

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2026 at 6:31 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

In our meeting last night we had specific disagreement on that.

I should be clear too that it's not like we had a "fight" or anything! This variation on the topic is something that I don't think has been discussed here before - at least in this way - so we're very much in the mode of exploring the possibilities rather than positions being set in stone.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 22, 2026 at 6:47 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

-- the desire for eating tasty highly palatable foods all the time is an "unlimited" desire (difficult to fulfill and comes with painful consequences)

[Food addiction - Wikipedia](#)

Quote

A **food addiction** or **eating addiction** is any [behavioral addiction](#) characterized primarily by the [compulsive](#) consumption of [palatable](#) and [hyperpalatable](#) food items, and potentially also [sugar-sweetened beverages](#) (SSBs). Such foods often have [high sugar](#), fat, and salt contents ([HFSS](#)), and markedly activate the [reward system](#) in humans and other animals. Those with eating addictions often overconsume such foods despite the adverse consequences (such as [excess weight gain](#), [diabetes](#), and [heart disease](#)) associated with their overconsumption.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 23, 2026 at 12:46 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

In fact, a major difference came out last night, in that one view is that if we can determine that a desire is neither natural nor necessary, then there is no reason to consider evaluating that action according to the hedonic calculus. That's because it is the point of view of some that we would NEVER under any circumstances pursue a desire that is neither natural nor necessary. In our meeting last night we had specific disagreement on *that*

In answer to your question [Cassius](#), this.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 23, 2026 at 10:40 AM

Rereading my last post, it would seem that I *do* agree with "we would never... pursue a desire that is neither natural or necessary." I pursue desires that are unnecessary, but I do try to avoid the unnatural.

To my embarrassment it seems that I misread the statement in the original post ☹️

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 10:53 AM

I am going to attempt to see what other citations I can find that might shed light on the relationship. I woke up this morning thinking that given how ethically-oriented it is, surely Frances Wright at least mentions the natural and necessary categories in "[A Few Days In Athens.](#)" However to my surprise so far, I find no mention of these categories whatsoever, including in chapters 3, 7, and 10, which are some of the most closely on point about how to pursue pleasure.

By no means am I a fan of arguing that Frances Wright is an ultimate authority on Epicurus, and I think she gets some major issues wrong or at least off base (determinism; nature of the gods; importance of physics of the cosmos; the importance of "theory" in connection with observation through the senses).

But I'd say the strength of her book is the way she expresses many of the ethical premises, and I find it very interesting that she does not even mention, much less give an explanation, of the natural and necessary categories.

(I know there are many passages referencing how to pursue pleasures properly, but i don't see the three categories specifically. If I am missing their appearance somewhere, please someone correct me! It's actually much easier for me to believe that I am overlooking them than it is for me to believe that she omits treating them.)

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 11:11 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4914-what-is-the-relationship-between-hedonic-calculus-analysis-and-natural-and-neces/>

As to Lucretius, I am finding zero reference to the natural and necessary categories. There are lots of ethical references in Lucretius to restraining desires, but I am not seeing the specific "natural and necessary" classification.

I find this even more surprising than its absence in Frances Wright, as I have presuming that it was at least mentioned somewhere.

Again, someone please correct me if I am overlooking it in Lucretius.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 11:16 AM

As to other ancient sources beyond Diogenes Laertius and Cicero that might be of help, I see that Diogenes of Oinoanda repeats the main citations but offers no additional explanation:

Fragment 32

Each (virtue?) therefore means of (?) ... just as if a mother for whatever reasons sees that the possessing nature has been summoned there, it then being necessary to allow the court to asked what each (virtue?) is doing and for whom [We must show] both which of the desires are natural and which are not; and in general all things that [are included] in the [former category are easily attained] ..

Fr. 39 lower margin (Epic. Sent. 29 = Sent. Vat. 20)

[Of the desires, some are natural and necessary; others] natural, but [not necessary]; and others neither natural nor [necessary, but the products of idle fancy.]

And perhaps Fr. 132 but there's not much here:

[However, such beings are not accustomed to obtain the good will of neighbours, nor] again [to favour whatever man they wish. If] therefore [they observe] what is natural and ...

MORE HELPFULLY HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT PHILODEMUS DOES MENTION IT, IF THIS STATEMENT FROM CLAUDE IS CORRECT. So the next place to look is going to be in Philodemus

Philodemus of Gadara (c. 110-40/35 BCE)

- His treatise *On Choices and Avoidances* (PHerc. 1251) explicitly discusses the classification of desires into natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural and unnecessary. **Column VI** contains a statement of the classification:

- Quote

"(of natural pleasures) some are necessary, others not necessary; and of the former ones themselves some are necessary for life, others for the health of the body, others for living happily."

Another clue is that Claude says that Philodemus applies this classification in his work *On Anger*, distinguishing between natural and empty anger based on Epicurus' distinction of natural and empty desires. However without a precise quote and reference I wouldn't take that to the bank.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 12:01 PM

Ok here's something of major significance from Plato. Recently [Joshua](#) brought up in a recent podcast that there's something of importance to derive from comparing Epicurus' views on individual happiness vs those of Plato in regard to the state. We didn't pursue that very far, but we need to take a look at it again. This article on Plato's Republic talks about the natural / necessary category scheme originating with Plato, and that Epicurus' division is a modification of Plato.

Maybe the great usefulness that Torquatus references of this division comes from correcting the errors of Plato! 😊 Anyway here is the cite and the text:

(As I cite this I am not sure if this link is to a book that includes Plato's text and this is the commentary section, or what.)

<https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0229/ch12.xhtml>

Here's the key section:

Quote

Interlude: Necessary versus Unnecessary Appetites

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4914-what-is-the-relationship-between-hedonic-calculus-analysis-and-natural-and-neces/>

Appetite governs the democratic soul, as it does in the oligarchic soul, but here Socrates makes a philosophically interesting distinction between kinds of appetites or desires. The democratic soul is governed by unnecessary desires, the sort the oligarch steadfastly and cautiously refused to indulge, while necessary desires govern the oligarchic soul. Socrates alluded to the distinction (without explaining it) when describing the oligarch, whom he called ‘a thrifty worker who satisfies only his necessary appetites’ (8.554a). And indeed, the distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires is implicit in the difference between the rustic and the luxurious ideal cities. The latter comes about because the citizens have ‘overstepped the limit of their necessities’ (2.373d), which suggests that in the rustic city, which Socrates regards as ‘the true city [...] the healthy one’ (2.372e), the citizens satisfy only their necessary appetites, whereas satisfying the unnecessary appetites fuels the luxurious city. So how do necessary and unnecessary desires differ?

Plato gives a two-pronged definition of necessary desires: ‘those we cannot desist from and those whose satisfaction benefits us [are] rightly called necessary for we are by nature compelled to satisfy them’ (8.558e). This ‘and’ should be an ‘or’, however, since a desire that meets either criterion will count as necessary. Consider bread. As a basic element in the Greek diet, we can think of it as proxy for food generally. A desire for bread is necessary on both counts: first, we cannot desist from it—we cannot not want it, as a desire for food comes with our animal nature. Someone without this desire—e.g., someone suffering from anorexia, which etymologically is the absence (the privative an-) of desire (orexis)—would be very badly off and in an unnatural, unhealthy state. Second, satisfying a desire for bread is good for us, and indeed we enjoy it. While bread makes life possible, good bread makes life enjoyable. So, too, do the delicacies we put on the bread make life more enjoyable, but we can learn to do without them. Remember that it was the absence of delicacies that Glaucon decried in the first, rustic ideal city back in Book II (2.372c), claiming the city was fit only for pigs. So a desire for delicacies will also count as a necessary desire, since it is natural for us to desire something to put on the bread. Only an appetite that fails both counts will be unnecessary. Though Socrates does not say so, presumably this will vary from person to person: you may be able to enjoy a cocktail before and a glass or two of wine with dinner, but for an alcoholic, even a couple of drinks starts them on the road to self-destructive drunkenness. So wine—also a Greek staple—is necessary for some of us but unnecessary for others.

Though the distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires is needed for Socrates to distinguish between the oligarchic and democratic souls, the democratic person rejects it, taking all desires to be equally worthy of pursuit: the democrat ‘puts all his pleasures on an equal footing’ (8.561b). The democratic person does not deny the distinction in a conceptual way, holding it to be incoherent or non-existent. Instead,

they deny that the distinction is a suitable basis for action and choice, 'declar[ing] that all pleasures are equal and must be valued equally' (8.561c). They do not think that necessary desires are better than unnecessary desires or that there is any reason to blush at pursuing what those frugal oligarchs regard as 'unnecessary [desires] that aim at frivolity and display' (9.572c). Where their fathers pursued only necessary desires, the young democrats reject this frugal austerity (and thus the order and discipline their focus on necessary desires gave rise to) and seek to indulge the desires that characterize the ne'er-do-well drones.

Although the democrat seems uninterested in thinking philosophically about Plato's way of distinguishing necessary and unnecessary desires, we might find it worthwhile to do so, to see if there are independent reasons to reject it or at least to reformulate it, as it seems awkward to regard a desire for delicacies as necessary, since, as Socrates himself points out, we can learn to give them up. So we do not get too far afield, let us consider briefly the taxonomy of desires Epicurus (bce 341–270) proposed. First, a word of warning: though the word 'epicurean' has some resonance with ancient Epicureanism (which took pleasure alone to be good in itself, the view we identified in an earlier chapter as hedonism), Epicurus actually took the absence of pain and disturbance to be what pleasure truly is. For him, the pleasure that constitutes the good is not a full belly but a tranquil mind.

Where Plato fuses necessary and natural desires, calling some desires necessary because they are natural, Epicurus distinguishes between what is natural and what is necessary. For Epicurus, a necessary desire is one whose non-satisfaction causes physical pain. When we do not eat, we experience the pangs of hunger. Thus a desire for food—for bread, as Socrates put it—counts as necessary. While every necessary desire is natural, for Epicurus, not all natural desires are necessary. The desire for bread is both natural and necessary. But desires for relishes, while natural, are not necessary. Think of a favorite dish. I love the Pha Ram Long Song at Ruam Mit Thai in downtown St Paul; its deliciousness makes my life better, but I can clearly live without it: it is a natural but unnecessary desire. If I show up only to find that the restaurant is no longer open on Sundays, I should react with mild disappointment: 'Oh, dang it! I was really looking forward to that. Oh well.' I will ask my companions where we should go instead. If, on the other hand, I am not disappointed but really angry that the restaurant is closed and am still muttering 'I cannot fricking believe it!' hours later, sulking and ruining dinner for everyone because I did not get what I wanted, then my desire is not only unnecessary, it is also unnatural. Excessive psychological distress at a desire's not being satisfied is not natural: there is something wrong with me. So the difference between natural but unnecessary desires and unnatural and unnecessary desires is not a difference in objects desired but rather in the desirer themselves. I should be able to eliminate my desire for x when x is difficult to obtain—or if x is bad for me.

Epicurus thinks that the source is usually ‘a groundless opinion’—some false belief that I cannot be happy unless I have this particular Thai dish or that flavor of ice cream or that I get a promotion, etc. In fact, for Epicurus eliminating such desires is one of the keys to happiness. No gourmand himself, Epicurus thought that

Plain fare gives as much pleasure as a costly diet, when once the pain of want has been removed, while bread and water confer the highest possible pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips. To habituate oneself, therefore, to simple and inexpensive diet supplies all that is needful for health, and enables a man to meet the necessary requirements of life without shrinking, and it places us in a better condition when we approach at intervals a costly fare and renders us fearless of fortune.⁵

Epicurus’ taxonomy of desire seems an improvement on Plato’s largely because he separates naturalness and necessity, which Plato conflates. Plato’s way of distinguishing necessary and unnecessary seems awkward and even mistaken—but if so, it is not a fatal mistake but rather one that is easily repairable.

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Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 12:08 PM

Wait -- "Anorexia" in the Greek means someone suffering from a general lack of desire? And it doesn't refer specifically to food in the Greek? I didn't know that! So the term is much more applicable to to many more situations than I would have guessed. Anyone who is depressed and dejected and suffering from lack of desire to live life is anorexic! (?) 😊

Someone without this desire—e.g., someone suffering from anorexia, which etymologically is the absence (the privative an-) of desire (orexis)—

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 1:35 PM

I should say that I included the commentary above not because I think it is correct, but that it points to an important connection to Plato. In fact, I disagree with most of the commentary he gives on Epicurus, especially "For him, the pleasure that constitutes the good is not a full belly but a tranquil mind." I think that statement is very misleading and is essentially false to the extent it implies that "the true good" is "tranquility."

But at the same time, I think the starting point to understanding Epicurus requires that we incorporate what Plato (and maybe Aristotle too) had already said, so that we can see what Epicurus thought he was correcting.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 2:04 PM

Here's a link to [Plato's Republic Book 8](#), which presumably is the start of the discussion that continues into Book 9 discussing Plato's views of natural and necessary

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 3:13 PM

It's going to be very difficult to digest the context in which this appears, what use Plato was making of it, and how and why Epicurus objected. Nevertheless the subject is very clearly discussed by Plato in Book 8 of the Republic in reference to the best form of government. It's worthy of note that at least in this translation it is natural and necessary *pleasures* being discussed:

Quote

Would you like, for the sake of clearness, to distinguish which are the necessary and which are the unnecessary pleasures?

I should.

Are not necessary pleasures those of which we cannot get rid, and of which the satisfaction is a benefit to us? And they are rightly called so, because we are framed by nature to desire both what is beneficial and what is necessary, and cannot help it.

True.

We are not wrong therefore in calling them necessary?

We are not.

And the desires of which a man may get rid, if he takes pains from his youth upwards—of which the presence, moreover, does no good, and in some cases the

reverse of good—shall we not be right in saying that all these are unnecessary?

Yes, certainly.

Suppose we select an example of either kind, in order that we may have a general notion of them?

Very good.

Will not the desire of eating, that is, of simple food and condiments, in so far as they are required for health and strength, be of the necessary class?

That is what I should suppose.

The pleasure of eating is necessary in two ways; it does us good and it is essential to the continuance of life?

Yes.

But the condiments are only necessary in so far as they are good for health?

Certainly.

And the desire which goes beyond this, of more delicate food, or other luxuries, which might generally be got rid of, if controlled and trained in youth, and is hurtful to the body, and hurtful to the soul in the pursuit of wisdom and virtue, may be rightly called unnecessary?

Very true.

May we not say that these desires spend, and that the others make money because they conduce to production?

Certainly.

And of the pleasures of love, and all other pleasures, the same holds good?

True.

And the drone of whom we spoke was he who was surfeited in pleasures and desires of this sort, and was the slave of the unnecessary desires, whereas he who was subject to the necessary only was miserly and oligarchical?

Very true.

....

After this he lives on, spending his money and labour and time on unnecessary pleasures quite as much as on necessary ones; but if he be fortunate, and is not too much disordered in his wits, when years have elapsed, and the heyday of passion is over—supposing that he then re-admits into the city some part of the exiled virtues, and does not wholly give himself up to their successors—in that case he balances his pleasures and lives in a sort of equilibrium, putting the government of himself into the hands of the one which comes first and wins the turn; and when he has had enough of that, then into the hands of another; he despises none of them but encourages them all equally.

Very true, he said.

Neither does he receive or let pass into the fortress any true word of advice; if any one says to him that some pleasures are the satisfactions of good and noble desires, and others of evil desires, and that he ought to use and honour some and chastise and master the others—whenever this is repeated to him he shakes his head and says that they are all alike, and that one is as good as another.

Yes, he said; that is the way with him.

Yes, I said, he lives from day to day indulging the appetite of the hour; and sometimes he is lapped in drink and strains of the flute; then he becomes a water-drinker, and tries to get thin; then he takes a turn at gymnastics; sometimes idling and neglecting everything, then once more living the life of a philosopher; often he is busy with politics, and starts to his feet and says and does whatever comes into his head; and, if he is emulous of any one who is a warrior, off he is in that direction, or of men of business, once more in that. His life has neither law nor order; and this distracted existence he terms joy and bliss and freedom; and so he goes on.

Yes, he replied, he is all liberty and equality.

Yes, I said; his life is motley and manifold and an epitome of the lives of many;—he answers to the State which we described as fair and spangled. And many a man and many a woman will take him for their pattern, and many a constitution and many an example of manners is contained in him.

Just so.

Let him then be set over against democracy; he may truly be called the democratic man.

Let that be his place, he said.

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Post by “Godfrey” of January 23, 2026 at 3:52 PM

Notice that Plato is discussing necessary/unnecessary *pleasures*, whereas Epicurus distinguishes necessary/unnecessary *desires*. As we've discussed elsewhere, this is an important distinction, specially since all pleasures are defined as good by Epicurus.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 4:01 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Notice that Plato is discussing necessary/unnecessary pleasures, whereas Epicurus distinguishes necessary/unnecessary desires. As we've discussed elsewhere, this is an important distinction, specially since all pleasures are defined as good by Epicurus.

Yes that's why I highlighted that point in my post above. I do think the distinction makes sense, but when I see these respected translators seemingly using the words interchangeably, here and in Tusculan Disputations, I really don't know what to think. Certainly in English "desire" is a different word from "pleasure," but I hope as we continue to examine this those who are fluent in Greek and Latin will be alert to this question and point out how much reliance we should place on this distinction. I'd be a lot more confident in arguing this if we had an article by Sedley or Cyril Bailey or someone of that stature making the same point. With the new search tools available to us maybe we can find just that.

Post by “Cassius” of January 23, 2026 at 4:25 PM

I am unable to find an academic article on point, but I am sure that my searching is incomplete. Desire and Pleasure are such common topics that references to the point could be made any number of places, but we're looking for something very specific to the effect that Epicurus was looking at the topic differently from Plato and/or others. I'll keep looking!

Post by “Bryan” of January 23, 2026 at 4:54 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4914-what-is-the-relationship-between-hedonic-calculus-analysis-and-natural-and-neces/>

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As to Lucretius, I am finding zero reference to the natural and necessary categories.

Yes, of course we have this section, 2.20, but it does not expand on the idea very much.

