

[Toby Sherman's Ancient Guide To Modern Well-being] That article I mentioned at the on line Wednesday 8/17 meeting

Post by "Cassius" of August 18, 2022 at 7:46 AM

Another brilliant statement of the issue - but I would say totally misguided. This is not the way Epicurus himself or any documented Epicurean ever lived or could live, obsessing over the elimination of sensual desire:

"Although this philosophy is not at all ascetic, it is disconcertingly hostile to desire. We are more accustomed to the notion that the bigger our hopes and dreams the better. If we fail to satisfy our grand desires then we will suffer, it's true, but at least we will have tried. Those people who lack desire, we think, may be content, but they have no chance of attaining anything great. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Indeed, there seems to be something timid about limiting desires to avoid dissatisfaction. Making sense of Epicurus' counter-intuitive claims about desire is very similar to

confronting the difficulties around the limits of pleasure. What must be demonstrated is that additional, unnecessary desires (even when satisfied) don't add anything. This is not as difficult as first appears, as long as we remember that pleasure cannot be extended beyond the point of contentment: perfect contentment is so complete that it cannot be bettered. Referring to this state as one of having no desires is misleading, and it is no wonder that this sounds unattractive. More accurately, this state is one of having every desire fulfilled, which means having everything we want now, and being completely confident of getting everything we want in the future. By definition, the fully-satisfied person can't gain any more satisfaction. Additional desires create pain, and satisfying those desires removes that pain. Therefore, it is true that continually satisfying more desires does provide more pleasure, but only by creating more discontent to dispel, and the level of pleasure and satisfaction, even with constant success, never rises above that of the person who is content with little. This should mean, if our understanding of Epicurus is correct, that in the last

scenario, that of having both money and food, Jack loses any advantage. Jill is perfectly content, as all of her desires are satisfied. Can we really say that Jack is any better off, in any meaningful way, given that both have everything they want? If we remember that the state of all-desires-satisfied is one of perfection, rather than mere contentment, it seems clear that additional desires have no power to better that situation."