

# The Art of Frugal Hedonism

Post by "Don" of February 17, 2023 at 9:40 PM

I hinted at this but let's make it explicit. The Art of Frugal Hedonism specifically mentions Epicurus, but I hadn't reached those sections yet. Let's jump ahead, shall we...

"The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus taught that three things are essential for a happy life: friendship, freedom, and time for contemplation."

Caption to a photo: "Bar of Frugal Legends: Robinson Crusoe, Epicurus, Ernest Shackleton, and Miss Honey. Now, who's buying the first round?"

In chapter 30: People who need people are the luckiest people in the world:

"The truth about Epicurus: Epicurus was an ancient Greek philosopher who lived from 341 to 270 BC. For most people, his name carries with it the stink of rich cheeses, the sloshing of wine pitchers, and a general association with luxuriant gourmandising.

"Records tell us that he was indeed partial to a spot of cheese, and was a great advocate for taking full pleasure in the sensual world, but in a manner far removed from the excessive indulgence suggested by his modern reputation. In fact, he firmly believed that simple meals provided as much joy as opulent ones, and saw extravagant desire as a surefire happiness-squisher: 'Do no spoil what you have by desiring what you have not.'

"Companionship on the other hand, he regarded as vital: 'Of all the things which wisdom provides to make us entirely happy, much the greatest is the possession of friendship.' Epicurus thought people should never eat alone, and should live close to a circle of friends who would nourish each other's minds, help each other in daily life, and support each other in times of struggle. He candidly described friendship as something which starts from a point of need, or from the hope of mutual benefit, but then grows into sheer pleasure at having the other person in one's life. He also viewed friendship *without* some element of mutual need as being somewhat vacuous.

"Not one for merely bandying lofty ideas around, Epicurus created The Garden, a sanctuary outside Athens where those interested in studying his philosophy (including women -- what would the neighbors say!) could live together by the Epicurean principles. Following his dreams obviously worked out well for him, as despite developing nasty kidney stones that made urination impossible in his old age, he apparently never complained about his suffering, and even wrote a letter to a friend on his last day on earth that described his mental state as 'blissful.'"

Under an image of one of the busts is the caption:

"Come on, look at those svelte cheekbones and tell us this wasn't a man who needed nothing more than some watered wine and barley cakes to have a good time."

Thoughts:

This all is no where near as stereotyped or ascetic as I've read in other places, including academic papers.

I'm not sure where they got the three things, but I don't necessarily disagree. The "freedom" is implied by his setting his Garden outside the city walls of Athens and not teaching in public. Time for contemplation is supported by the "wise one enjoys contemplation more than others" and other similar textual references including "mediate on these day and night with a friend."

I think they may misunderstand his position with the "extravagant desire as a surefire happiness-squisher." However, they did say \*desires\* here and not pleasures, and as [Godfrey](#) has pointed out, desires and pleasures are NOT the same thing. We also have Dr. Austin's book to thank for a much better explanation of "extravagant" pleasures.

The picture caption with the "watered wine and barley cakes" is fine by me. The Greeks \*did\* water their wine, and Epicurus DID eat barley cakes. He also experimented with - oh, let's just call it intermittent fasting because that's what it was... but **\*\*Experimented\*\*** not lived that ascetically all the time. I'm still trying to bake edible barley cakes myself, but I don't use MY experiments as good examples of what Epicurus ate.

All in all, better than I hoped for. Not perfect by any means, but someone reading this would come away with a "better" perspective on Epicurus than most places!