

My 2024 Resolution: Get A More Accurate Picture of Epicurean Pleasure To The World Rather Than "Tranquility" or "Live Unkown"(Comment on Irish Times Article)

Post by "Cassius" of January 1, 2024 at 7:03 AM

Here's a part of a new article from today in the "Irish Times". It's not terrible, and it contains some good material, but it spins "live unknown" (which as we've seen from [our interview with Dr. Boeri](#) is poorly documented and probably not a key Epicurean advice) as if it is the key to happiness, and once again emphasizes "tranquility" rather than Epicurus' wider view of pleasure:

[Here's the secret to happiness in 2024, according to a dead Greek philosopher: don't get noticed](#)

New Year's resolutions can be hard work. Join a gym? Change jobs? Travel the world? It is exhausting just thinking of the options.

To make matters simpler for you, here's a bit of advice from the Greek philosopher Epicurus: "Live Unnoticed."

It's a rule not just for 2024 but for life, according to academic philosopher Alex Moran. "The point of the slogan is to guide us towards living a tranquil and peaceful life."

Currently based at the Université de Fribourg in Switzerland, Moran was formerly an Irish Research Council research fellow at Trinity College Dublin and is moving to Princeton in the United States next year in a whirlwind tour of scholarliness that sounds anything but tranquil. However, Moran stresses that to "Live Unnoticed" is not necessarily to quit your career or to let yourself go. Rather, it's about letting go of the wrong sort of desires. "I think that Epicurus would say that the point of the dictum is not to rule out all activities that might get you noticed, but rather to insist that we need to avoid doing things for the wrong reasons."

Moran, who hails from Southport in England and is an Irish citizen with some Co Offaly roots in his family, explains further as this week's Unthinkable guest.

What did Epicurus mean by 'Live unnoticed'?

"To live quietly or unnoticed, for Epicurus, is to live in peace, to live in tranquillity – and this for Epicurus is the only way to live a happy life. But to live tranquilly, in peace, one has to eschew certain things – certain 'loud' ways of living that involve chasing after power, fame and status,

seeking to make a name for oneself, striving for riches well beyond what one actually needs, engaging in pointless conflicts, making sure one is well-regarded by all, and various other things of that nature.”

How did the motto fit into his wider philosophical outlook?

“Epicurus was a hedonist, who thought that pleasure is the only good. It is this commitment that often leads people to wrongly think of Epicurus as a kind of glutton, who thought that lavish dinners with expensive wines might somehow constitute the key to happiness. In fact, Epicurus thinks the only genuine pleasures are those he calls the ‘tranquil pleasures’.

“There are ways to object to this. Nietzsche, for example, famously wished upon his friends ‘suffering, desolation, sickness, ill-treatment, indignities’, since, he thought, it is only through enduring suffering that one could say one’s life had any value. But that’s a radical idea, and many of us will agree with Epicurus that a tranquil, peaceful life is a good one.”

Alex Moran: 'Many of us will agree with Epicurus that a tranquil, peaceful life is a good one' Some might see it as a shrunken or inferior existence. Why not live loudly since you’ve only one life?

“It’s a good question. To return again to Nietzsche, another of his famous claims is that one ought to live dangerously. A valuable and worthy life, he thinks, not only involves overcoming suffering, but also taking risks and meeting difficult challenges. But this is perhaps a far cry from striving to live quietly or unnoticed.

“There might be room for reconciling these outlooks. A more combative Epicurean response here, however, would be to insist – and not at all unreasonably – that since the good life is a life of pleasure and happiness, and since pleasure and happiness require tranquillity, Nietzsche is simply on the wrong track. Here it is useful to reflect on what kind of life one would wish for oneself: a life full of suffering and difficulty, or a life full of the enjoyment of tranquil pleasure?

“Epicurus agreed that we live only once, viewing belief in the afterlife as a dangerous myth. However, I think Epicurus would say that, especially because there is no afterlife, it is important that we spend our limited time on Earth wisely.”

What would Epicurus say about modern society?

“The question points to an important lesson we can learn from Epicurus. In our consumerist age, we tend to be very image- and status-obsessed. We buy things to make ourselves look good. We post on social media for the same reason. We care about our image and we can’t be happy unless the world thinks well of us. I think all this serves only to increase misery and stress.

“We’d all be mentally much healthier if, in Epicurean fashion, we cared a lot less about image and status. Instead, we should focus on our friends and families, and on activities that

constitute sources of tranquil pleasure and which are valuable in and of themselves.”

Is political activism compatible with living unnoticed?

“One of Epicurus’s main philosophical opponents, the Roman orator Cicero, criticised Epicureanism precisely on the grounds that it encourages a problematic political quietism. But Epicurus was not against all forms of political involvement. He placed a great deal of value on friendship, and thought that building a community of like-minded people was essential to living well.

“For Epicurus, what we should be avoiding are the corrosive desires for power, fame, wealth and status, which produce anxiety and undermine tranquillity. It doesn’t follow that we must avoid all those activities that might lead to recognition, whether it be political activism, the production of great art or becoming excellent at sport. What matters is that we do things for the right reasons, so as to preserve tranquillity and peace.”