

Analysing movies through an Epicurean lens

Post by “Rolf” of May 12, 2025 at 4:54 PM

Hey folks! I'm back from my trip and thought I'd jump into a fun discussion. As a big film geek, I've recently been reflecting on movies from an Epicurean perspective, and I wanted to share a couple of key points to kick things off:

1) While movies can be valuable tools for exploring philosophy, they are rarely a perfect depiction of Epicurean principles unless that's the filmmaker's intention. I believe it's crucial that we acknowledge where a movie and its characters align with the philosophy and where they diverge. Not all elements of a film will resonate with Epicurean thought.

2) At the same time, I believe that almost any movie can be analyzed through an Epicurean lens, particularly if we operate under the assumption of psychological hedonism. After all, most characters are in pursuit of pleasure and avoiding pain, though they may differ in how effectively they navigate that pursuit. Examining this aspect of characters' motivations can provide insights into the challenges they face in seeking pleasure—whether it's through their choices, desires, or failures.

With that out of the way, let's dive in!

The Big Lebowski (SPOILERS BELOW)

The Big Lebowski centers around Jeff Lebowski, better known as the Dude. Despite being an easy-going slacker, the Dude gets wrapped up in a convoluted kidnapping plot along with his bowling buddies.

Where it aligns

- The Dude enjoys the natural pleasures of life. He values necessary pleasures such as his friendship with Walter and Donny and resting at home. He also partakes in "extravagant" pleasures such as bowling, White Russians, and music without becoming overly attached to them.
- The Dude also rejects unnatural & unnecessary or "corrosive" desires, such as wealth and status. This is exemplified by his juxtaposition to the other Lebowski, a wealthy and renowned man, who the former is notably uninterested in. He drives a beat-up old car and often wears a ragged bathrobe.
- Friendship is a core aspect of this movie. Throughout the film, the Dude attempts to ease conflict diplomatically and keep the peace. When all is said and done, he is back at the bowling alley with Walter.

Where it doesn't (or examples of what not to do)

- While unfortunate that he is beaten up by thugs and has his rug pissed on, the Dude's real conflict stems from corrosive desires, specifically his friend Walter's desire for wealth. When the wealthy Lebowski offers the Dude money to bring back his kidnapped wife Bunny, the Dude refuses, preferring not to get wrapped up in unnecessary conflict and stress. However, his friend Walter convinces him otherwise, setting off the chaotic events of the movie.
- I'd like to say more about Walter's rage, Bunny, and the Nihilists, but it's getting late so I'll have to save it for another day!