

Are There Examples of Greek or Roman Art Holding Up "Absence of Pain" As An Ideal To Be Desired? - Reference: Oblovomitis!

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2019 at 9:05 PM

Can you imagine any admirable figure in a Greek or Roman mythological story staking his or her position on the affirmation: "All I want in life is absence of pain!" Maybe such a character did exist, but it would almost certainly have been considered to be a pitiful one, rather than serving as a role model for something that is desirable or to be emulated.

And yet we are supposed to believe that Epicurean Philosophy swept the Greco Roman world proclaiming just that as its goal for the ideal life!

If that is what the public who were attracted to Epicurus thought he was advocating, Epicurus would have been laughed out of town, not held up as a virtual savior and "god" himself.

The sad and irritating thing is that the joke is on those who are foolish enough to believe that nonsense. All this "confusion" is not an innocent mistake.

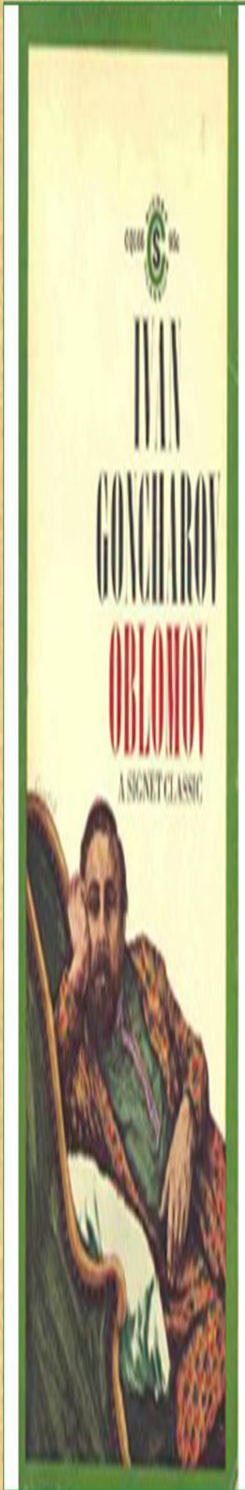
Edit: [Elli](#) This might be an argument worth re-using in the future. Are you aware if any figure in Greek or Roman mythology who is identified as pursuing "absence of pain" as their goal for existence? Did not the ancients embody their ideals in their mythology? Is the absence of enshrining such an ideal in a notable figure not evidence that they did not consider such a goal admirable, or even conceivable?

Note: This thread originated in [Charles' thread on Handel](#), but is being split off to avoid hijacking that topic: [Epicurean-esque Music? A Quick Look at Act 1 of George Friedrich Handel's "Acis & Galatea"](#)

Post by "Elli" of November 7, 2019 at 10:34 AM

Until now, no one of the ancient greek figures comes into my mind for confirming this: "all I want in life is absence of pain".

However, my friend Cassius, in the past, I mentioned to you a figure of such kind of man from Russia. His name was Ilya Ilyich Oblomov. Here we have the leader of oblomovitis. 😊😊



<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1269-are-there-examples-of-greek-or-roman-art-holding-up-absence-of-pain-as-an-ideal/>

ILYA ILYICH OBLMOV was lying in bed one morning in his flat in Gorokhovaya Street in one of those large houses

Post by "Cassius" of November 7, 2019 at 11:18 AM

Quote

Oblomov (Russian: Обломов; [e'blɔmɐf]) is the second novel by Russian writer [Ivan Goncharov](#), first published in 1859. Ilya Ilyich Oblomov is the central character of the novel, portrayed as the ultimate incarnation of the [superfluous man](#), a symbolic character in 19th-century Russian literature. Oblomov is a young, generous [nobleman](#) who seems [incapable of making important decisions](#) or [undertaking any significant actions](#). Throughout the novel he rarely leaves his room or bed. In the first 50 pages, he manages only to move from his bed to a chair.^[1] The book was considered^[by whom?] a satire of Russian [intelligentsia](#).

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oblomov>

This probably does not strictly qualify as an example of a character held up as a DESIRABLE example of putting "absence of pain" first, but that may be because it is largely inconceivable to find much that is desirable in putting absence of pain first!

On the other hand, this sounds like a VERY GOOD satire of MUCH "intelligentsia"!

Good catch -- how did you come across this?

(I might split this off from Charles' thread if it becomes too much of a distraction. But I do think it is a productive sidetrack to talk about this because that is essentially behind Charles' original post - thinking about the relationship of Epicurean positions to instances from Greco-Roman art.)

Plot Summary - Pretty much the natural result of putting "avoiding pain" at the front of one's life! -

The novel focuses on the life of the main character, Ilya Ilyich Oblomov. Oblomov is a member of the upper middle class and the son of a member of Russia's nineteenth century landed gentry. Oblomov's distinguishing characteristic is his slothful attitude towards life. Oblomov raises this trait to an art form, conducting his little daily business from his bed.

The first part of the book finds Oblomov in bed one morning. He receives a letter from the manager of his country estate, Oblomovka, explaining that the financial situation is deteriorating and that he must visit to make some major decisions. But Oblomov can barely

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leave his bedroom, much less journey a thousand miles into the country.

As he sleeps, a dream reveals Oblomov's upbringing in Oblomovka. He is never required to work or perform household duties, and his parents constantly pull him from school for vacations and trips or for trivial reasons. In contrast, his friend Andrey Stoltz, born to a German father and a Russian mother, is raised in a strict, disciplined environment, and he is dedicated and hard-working.

Stoltz visits at the end of Part 1, finally rousing Oblomov from sleep. As the story develops, Stoltz introduces Oblomov to a young woman, Olga, and the two fall in love. However, his apathy and fear of moving forward are too great, and she calls off their engagement when it is clear that he will keep delaying their wedding and avoiding putting his affairs in order.

Oblomov is swindled repeatedly by his "friends" Taranteyev and Ivan Matveyevich, his landlady's brother, and Stoltz has to undo the damage each time. The last time, Oblomov ends up living in penury because Taranteyev and Ivan Matveyevich are blackmailing him out of all of his income from the country estate, which lasts for over a year before Stoltz discovers the situation and reports Ivan Matveyevich to his supervisor. Meanwhile, Olga leaves Russia and visits Paris, where she bumps into Stoltz on the street. The two strike up a romance and end up marrying.

However, not even Oblomov could go through life without at least one moment of self-possession and purpose. When Taranteyev's behavior at last reaches insufferable lows, Oblomov confronts him, slaps him around a bit and finally kicks him out of the house. Sometime before his death he is visited by Stoltz, who had promised to his wife a last attempt at bringing Oblomov back to the world. During this visit Stoltz discovers that Oblomov has married his widowed landlady, Agafia Pshenitsina, and had a child - named Andrey, after Stoltz. Stoltz realizes that he can no longer hope to reform Oblomov, and leaves. Oblomov spends the rest of his life in a second Oblomovka, continuing to be taken care of by Agafia Pshenitsina as he used to be taken care of as a child. She can prepare the food he likes, meal, and makes sure that Oblomov does not have a single worrisome thought.

By then Oblomov had already accepted his fate, and during the conversation he mentions "Oblomovitis" as the real cause of his demise. Oblomov dies in his sleep, finally fulfilling his wish to sleep forever. Stoltz adopts his son upon his death.

Post by "Cassius" of November 7, 2019 at 11:40 AM

It appears that Elaine Blair is a good candidate for Cambridge-style Epicureanism - Also from the wikipedia article:

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However, Elaine Blair argues in "The Short Happy Life of Ilya Ilyich Oblomov" that Oblomov is "not merely lazy." She simply says, "our hero favors very short-term pleasures over long-term ones," "he is self-conscious in a way that no farcical character or Rabelaisian grotesque would be," and "to Oblomov, to be absorbed in any task is to lose something of oneself; a person can maintain his full dignity only in repose."[\[8\]](#)

: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2010/...ilyich-oblomov/>

The Short Happy Life of Ilya Ilyich Oblomov

Elaine Blair

AUGUST 19, 2010 ISSUE

Oblomov

by Ivan Goncharov, translated from the Russian by Marian Schwartz
Seven Stories, 552 pp., \$33.95; Yale University Press, 576 pp., \$16.95 (paper)

Ivan Goncharov worked on *Oblomov* for about ten years, from the late 1840s until 1858, but a reader is left with the impression that the hero was born to him in a single vision, and that the five-hundred-plus pages of the book are an attempt at novelistic elaboration of what is essentially one idea: What if a man were so indolent that he could do nothing? Aristocrats in Russian literature before and after *Oblomov* suffer from ennui, waste time, despair of finding moral purpose. But nonetheless they helplessly go on doing things: drinking, gambling, marrying, fighting duels, joining the Freemasons. Not Oblomov. He spends the first third of the book shambling around his apartment in a robe. When he finally gets dressed, near the beginning of Part II, it is only because his best friend, Stolz, has absolutely insisted on it.

This seems very parallel to our discussion of the "Office Space" movie: [An Error-Filled Video from the Neo-Epicureans: Office Space](#)

Post by "Elli" of November 7, 2019 at 11:50 AM

There is a movie that is based on this novel. Here is some critics on the movie and the book.

An inactive (all I want in my life is absence of pain) nobleman, with the name Oblomov, a classic good-hearted lazy of the aristocratic old school, and the other with the name Stolts, who is a dynamic and ambitious businessman, imbued with the spirit of rationality and progress. These two men have been friends since their childhood. Oblomov, is sticking to the values of a lost old world, stubbornly refuses to accept his friend's life stance and dismisses it as frivolous, cynical and superficial. Of course, he suffers deeply because he knows that he is already out of things and that he has no place in a rapidly changing new world era. When a beautiful woman with the name Olga comes between them, their lives and their relationship will be tested.

The film is a cinematic rendition of Oblomov's novel, written in 1859 by Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov (1812-1891), who, along with Gogol, is considered one of the founders of realistic tradition in Russian literature. Goncharov is a keen observer of the changes that happened in

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the Russian spirit, psyche and mentality, by the Napoleonic invasion in Russia, and the consequences of the Russian army's reverse course to the west, have brought to these historical paths, for the first time contact of two different worlds to be collided: the traditional obsolete feudal structures of the East with individualism, rationality, entrepreneurship and the scientific conquests of the West. In this film - his first major production - and one of his best, Mikhalkov manages to capture and capture on screen, with great clarity and confrontation, the conflict as well as the contradictory aspects of the old and the new world era, through the diametrically opposite central characters.

The superbly sketched figure of Oblomov - a prodigal Chekhovian hero - symbolizes the lazy and dreamy eternal Russian soul, full of emotional outbursts, while the positivist Stolts is the aggressive, dynamic and energetic playmate of the new era, who, not only he will win the game of life, but in the end, he will conquer the heart of Olga. A velvet-driven film, full of lyricism, poetry, and stunningly natural landscapes, it delivers the historical conflict between the receding past and the futuristic future within the relationship of the central characters. Mikhalkov manages, in a unique way, to capture the crucial historical changes in the inner landscapes of the heroes, just when Oblomov is lost in the waste of History and the other Stolts finds the passage to the future. Great is Oleg Tambakov's performance on the Oblomov's role.

Post by “Elli” of November 7, 2019 at 12:00 PM

I wonder if that lady with the name Elaine Blair has already or she would like to have in her life such a husband like Oblomov ! Speaking theoretically is easy...and when the theories are applying in practice and at stake things, issues and persons are so different. 😊

Post by “Charles” of November 7, 2019 at 12:57 PM

I'm sure as a counterpoint to the initial claim of this thread, we can find more evidence of the contrary.

Like the *Satyricon* a work of adventure by who we believe to be Nero's Fashion adviser, Gaius Petronius (Arbiter). Many of its characters are care-free, in wanton lust with one another, of many backgrounds and occupations. What binds them together is not only love & sex with each other, but the merriment of adventure & pleasure. (This was written a little under 90 years after Lucretius died)

In one of the later chapters, this party finds themselves in the company of an obscenely wealthy Elite, who find themselves bored and tired of the extreme extravagance and pretension of learning. In addition to their gaudy host, the adversary of the main character is a Sophist by the name of Agamemnon.

I wouldn't claim that the party of adventurers in this novel are Epicurean, but even in Neronian Rome they deny obscene pleasures & don't seem to fall in the camp of "freedom from pain".

Post by "Cassius" of November 7, 2019 at 1:06 PM

Right -- while there may be characters who focus on "Absence of pain" (I feel sure that they are, at least in a generic sense of shrinking from any effort or danger) are any of them held up to be worthy of emulation?

Now I suspect that there may well be characters who are both (clearly pursuing pleasure plus worthy of admiration) possibly including Petronius, but I mean to be specific: are any of them affirmatively and specifically pursuing "absence of pain" as their stated goal, rather than "pleasure" as we ordinarily understand the term. I am thinking that all of the characters pursuing pleasure are defining their goal in the normal way, never as "absence of pain" unless they are clearly slothful such as Oblomov apparently is.