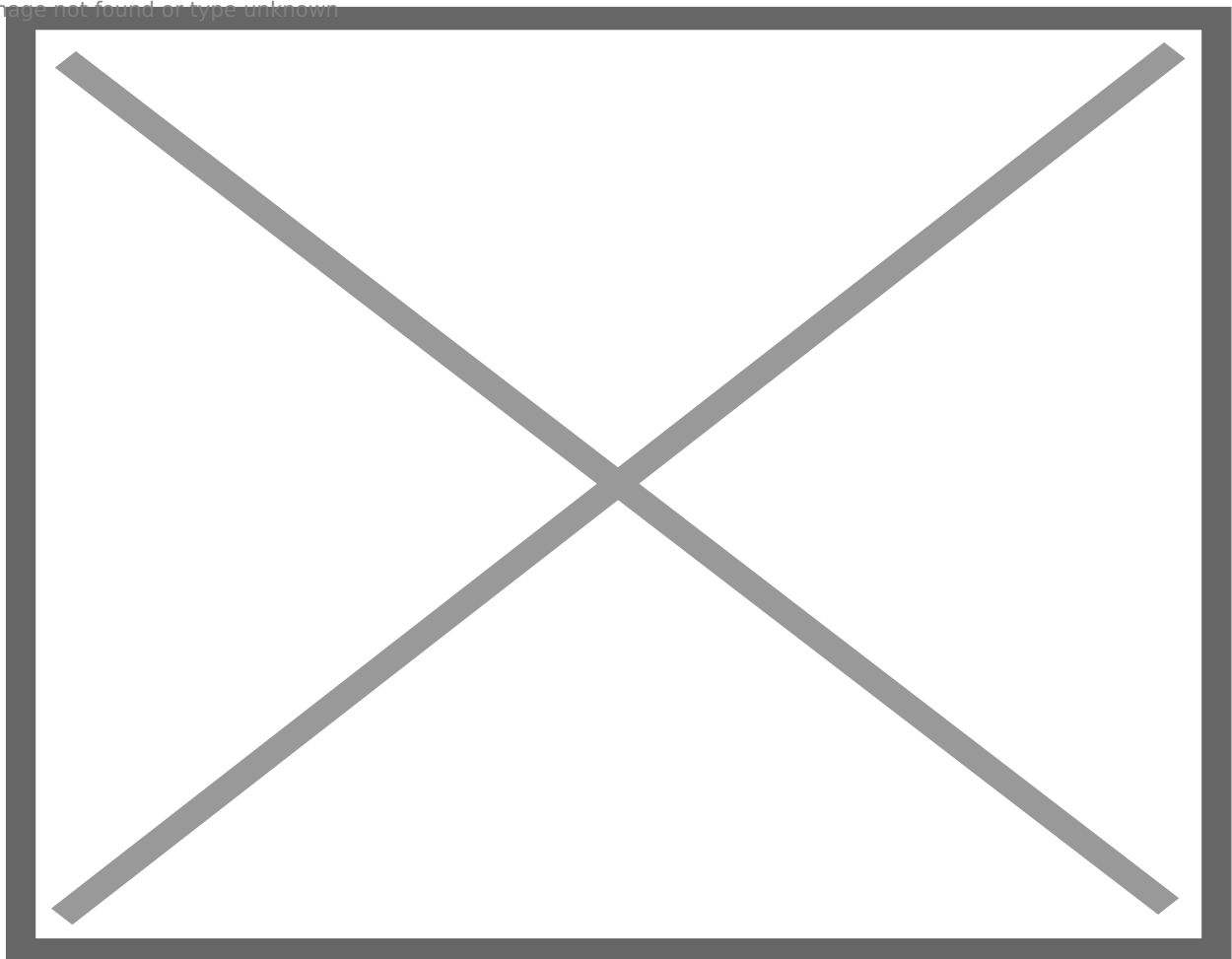


Tim O'Keefe's "Epicurean Guide To Christmas" (An Article And Responses)

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2021 at 2:28 PM

Thanks to Nate for finding this link and posting it at the Facebook group. Given the many problems I have with this article, I didn't want to post it here without seeing some responses to here it first, but now Elli has written on it (which I will paste below too) and I have some comments too. Here's the link:

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[The Epicurean's guide to Christmas | Tim O'Keefe](#)

The Epicureans would do Christmas very differently than most people assume. Sure, they were hedonists, they were all for pleasure. But for them that didn't...

iai.tv

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2021 at 2:29 PM

Elli's first comment:

IMO in a "test" written in this article, there are some thoughts who is the genuine epicurean, and how he/she thinks and acts in real life. Let's examine this "test".

"The test would be, let's imagine that your Christmas meal accidentally burnt up in the oven, and you had to break out some rice and beans from the pantry. Would you be upset, or would you laugh about it and enjoy the rice and beans?"

On the above question of that "test" the first thought that came in my mind was that quote by Menander:

- Γελάει δ' ὁ μωρός, κἄν τι μὴ γέλοιοι ᾗ. Γελάει ὁ ἀνόητος καὶ ἀν' ἀκόμα δὲν ὑπάρχει κάτι το ἀστεῖο.

In english => The fool laughs even when there's nothing funny.


(Short sayings by Menander -Sententiae Menandri).

First of all, a genuine epicurean that is doing something pleasurable and joyfull (e.g. here we see that he/she cooks for a special occasion) is prudent, and PRUDENCE - in the basis of the experiences and the right measurement among pain and pleasure - is his/her guide for being careful to not burn a festive meal, as well as a genuine epicurean is not a stoic to laugh like a fool in every occasion.

But although IF an epicurean would burn up accidentally a meal that is for a special occasion, he will be upset for a moment and then thinking clearly, he will pick up the phone to order something special from a local taverna, since the genuine epicurean is not a stingy and sociopath man like the Cynics.

Thus, in the basis of responsibility, since a genuine epicurean is responsible personality, he will spend some money more buying something special for his friends, paying for his error and at the same time is helping the local store/restaurant/taverna and his local market, in general.

For this reason, and since a genuine epicurean is friendly with the others, the owner of that local taverna, when he would hear that his friendly epicurean has burnt up the festive meal in the oven, he will offer him and a generous discount, since the owner of that taverna wants to preserve and adding some good clients.

So simply a genuine epicurean passes a "test" in real life, and that's how he preserves the social coherence!  page not found or type unknown

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2021 at 2:30 PM

Elli's Second Comment:

"The Greeks were not teachers with the narrow sense of the meticulous and the poor-speaker. They never advised as the grumble old women do. Neither did they come down to the people as the agents of the Law and austere rulers, to play it as panaceas and the leading experts of the Earth.

Artists cautiously disheveled, night-time hearers and observers of the stars, bright speakers, improvised debaters on the sacred road to Eleusis, ephemeral athletes, life-long lovers and lovers of Eros. These were the Greeks at their base. They sacrificed in beauty, as the flowers sacrificing in the sun. I mean they stun the air with their colors and smells, and the next day they wilt.

The Greeks were generous in their poorness, cruel in their persistence, and happy in their melancholy. We find them to prefer the today's waste of time than to save for an ulterior motive of tomorrow. And here they are different from the Jews and other Orientalists of religions and dogmas.

A banquet rich of philosophical discussions, with drinks, food and players of pipes, the Greek did not exchange it for even nine months more time of his life."

(An excerpt of the book "Polychronion - Stoa and Rome" by Dimitris Liantinis).

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Epicure...56685981047003/>



Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2021 at 2:31 PM

My first comment:

Thanks to Nate for finding and posting this link, and to Elli for her initial responses. This article will likely serve as a good basis for us to discuss once again some of the biggest divisions of opinion among those who are fans of Epicurus.

In general, I will say that articles and books by Tim Okeefe and James Warren contain lots of excellent citations to source material. They and others like them are professionals who have studied these issues all their adult lives and they have access to a wider scope of information, and academic resources, than do most of us who aren't professional philosophers.

That said, opinions such as are stated in this article are open to challenge and discussion no matter who writes them (including us). Regular readers of this group will know that there are opposing camps as to how best to interpret Epicurus' "tranquility" references. This article by OKeefe shows that he is definitely in the "Tranquillist"camp. Here his own words:

"So while it's right to call the Epicureans hedonists, insofar as they believe that our goal is to live a life of pleasure, given their idiosyncratic conception of what pleasure is, it might be less misleading to call them "tranquillists."

I would argue in response that Epicurus would have objected strongly to that changing of the focus from "pleasure" to "tranquility," and that attempting to do so mutates Epicurus' true teachings into a version of "Stoicism-lite." In fact "Stoicism-lite" is a theme that I think astute readers will find throughout Okeefe's article. interestingly enough, however, more so in the synopsis (written by someone besides Okeefe?) rather than in the details of the article;

"The Epicureans would do Christmas very differently than most people assume. ... But for them that didn't involve lavish meals and copious amounts of drink. ... Instead, they emphasized the psychological pleasure of tranquility and the pleasures of friendship. They would be at home with Christmas gatherings and the practice of giving thoughtful gifts to loved ones. They could even stretch to celebrating Jesus Christ as a God, if that meant looking at him as a role model to aspire to, not as a source of salvation and guarantee of an afterlife, writes Tim O'Keefe. "

Whether or not Okeefe intends this to be a summary of his work, I would strongly object to the view that Epicureans didn't value good food and drink or that that they emphasize "tranquility" over pleasure as normally defined. Even in this summary there is contradiction - many of our most important friendships can hardly be described as "tranquil"! So which is it tranquility or friendship?? Thus are the contradictions that arise when we think that Epicurus decided to adopt a tricky definition of "pleasure." But to suggest that devoted classical Epicureans would celebrate "Jesus Christ as a God" - that's a suggestion that I suggest many centuries of ancient Epicureans would - and did - find offensive. One does not lightly celebrate the figures in whose name the ancient world and its ancient learning were forever (?) overthrown.

We'll be talking about issues raised in articles like this as long as we're reading about Epicurus in this group and other places. Just be aware: this "Tranquillist" viewpoint may appear to be, and may in fact be, the "Academic Orthodoxy." You may have to recite it back if you study philosophy in College.

But you don't aren't (yet) forced to believe the Tranquillist viewpoint. There are places on the internet such as this group and Epicureanfriends.com where that position does not dominate. As for me and the people whose opinions I most respect about Epicurus, if the "Tranquillist" viewpoint were in fact what Epicurus really taught, I would suggest you forget him immediately and go back to looking for a competent and truly life-affirming philosophy.

Post by “Don” of December 29, 2021 at 5:50 PM

I think we have to be careful not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. Epicurus writes fairly often about the health of the body and the tranquility of the mind. He is concerned with both our physical and mental well-being. There's nothing wrong with having a calm, tranquil mind. I would argue it's much easier to enjoy any pleasure if your mind is calm or is able to return to being calm and tranquil. I equate that calmness with re-energizing, with calm seas and safe harbor. I would not enjoy being always in a state of elation or excitement. That sounds exhausting! I also am more and more coming around to the idea that biological homeostasis is what equates to ataraxia, and it was this kind of balance, calm, tranquility in our minds and bodies to which Epicurus was - correctly, in my opinion - able to identify as a pleasure. Not THE pleasure, but a pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2021 at 6:16 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Not THE pleasure, but a pleasure.

And THAT, good sir, is the issue! 😊 Because that (tranquility as THE goal rather than A goal) is what Okeefe and those who write like he does are relentlessly asserting.

And as we've recently been discussing as to logic, if we're going to talk in terms of a "highest" goal, there can only be one such animal.

I would like to think that no one would be so foolish as to write off tranquility as desirable, or to think that any other reasonable person would do that. So I don't think I or any of us are in danger of actually becoming lulled into constant frenetic activity.

Are there any of those here? 😊 Please step up and name yourselves! 😊 I have a lot of projects I'd love to have some help with! 😊

And in fact I think the danger is quite the reverse. A lot of very good people ARE in danger of looking only to "tranquility" - to "rest" - to passivity, and to other and more darker forms of resignation that border on "giving up" everything in life just for the sake of "absence of pain." The pressures of modern life, and the absence of good solid philosophic alternatives, drive a lot of people to the edge of despair. I would tag a lot of the problem with people strung out on meth and other drugs as being fed by the degeneracy of culture that Epicurus was fighting against. Fatalism, nonsensical virtue for the sake of virtue, imaginary heavens and hells, etc.

So I would say that if we had to rank those who swing from one extreme to the other, both of which would be wrong, there are a much higher number of people among those attracted to the O'Keefe version of Epicurus that are on the "passivity" side of that list.

And when I think about the energy and enthusiasm and vigor that I think is going to be necessary to re-establish Epicurean philosophy as a viable community and viable philosophic alternative, I think that passivity and withdrawal, and a designation that "tranquility" is our goal, is just about the worst poison pill for Epicurean philosophy that any Stoic could ever dream up.

I think Epicurus was engaged in what was essentially a philosophic war against the rival schools, and a war footing is probably where a good number of us need to be. 😊

But rest assured, when my war is over, I'll be looking for more than a little tranquility!

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 29, 2021 at 11:15 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

a war footing is probably where a good number of us need to be.

The modern world is built upon scientific and technological progress. The question is: are people happy? Many people live compartmentalized and socially isolated lives. But my own feeling is "make love not war"...And I hold on to the dream of creating a 21st Century Epicurean Garden. (Everything must start with a dream)...I dream of teaching the art of love and the art of

cooking, and others will give talks on Epicurean ethics, the art of hedonic calculus, and the art of friendship...and still others will teach the enjoyment of nature and science, and the core Epicurean philosophy.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 29, 2021 at 11:22 PM

This reminds me of [VS11](#):

For most people, to be quiet is to be numb and to be active is to be frenzied.

I'm not aware of the specific source of this, but it does seem to reinforce Don's post above.

Post by “Don” of December 29, 2021 at 11:59 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

A lot of very good people ARE in danger of looking only to "tranquility" - to "rest" - to passivity, and to other and more darker forms of resignation that border on "giving up" everything in life just for the sake of "absence of pain."

While I agree that some may misinterpret "tranquility" and equate it with passivity, that does a disservice to idea of rest, relaxation, and re-energizing. That's not Epicurus's fault. I agree that that's a Stoic and Academic (in both senses of the word) misinterpretation. Epicurus's "tranquility of the mind" is not a passive numbness or unconsciousness or anesthesia. It's a *pleasurable experience* not a lack of feeling. It is experienced with the mind, just as aponia is experienced as relaxation and "freedom from pain" and experienced by the body. That's why Epicurus touts:

Quote

The steady contemplation of these things equips one to know how to decide all choice and rejection for the health of the body and for the tranquility of the mind, that is for our physical and our mental existence, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For the sake of this, we do everything in order to neither be in bodily or mental pain nor to be in fear or dread; and so, when once this has come into being around us, it sets free all

of the calamity, distress, and suffering of the mind, seeing that the living being has no need to go in search of something that is lacking for the good of our mental and physical existence.

It's not numbness that is the goal here, it is that feeling of complete pleasure that comes from being free of all distress and suffering of body and mind. To be filled with pleasure, head to toe, body and mind... The limit of pleasure, as if living the life of a god. We take personal responsibility to make choices and rejections to bring this about. To paraphrase, when the health of the body and the tranquility (ataraxia) of the mind has "come into being," that is, when we are filled with pleasure (which is what aponia and ataraxia are!), we are free of all distress and suffering precisely because we are filled with pleasure. That's not something to hide under a bushel. That's a feature, not a bug.

I also have to say your "war footing" sounds exhausting! 🤔 Whew! I know where you're coming from - and I applaud your efforts - and providing an alternative to the Stoic manly-man look-at-my-virtue i-take-cold-showers mindset is a laudable goal, but I go back to [some of the characteristics of the sage](#) when this comes up. I do agree we're "fighting" an "uphill battle" against the minimalist, 'freedom from pain' academic interpretations, but all those struggle, battle, war, fighting metaphors are making me tired. I will say I can't believe "resistance is futile" (There's your Star Trek reference 😊) or I wouldn't have gone to the trouble of writing up my Menoikeus notes and posting them. But even Epicurus took rest in the Garden from time to time, took time to celebrate festivals, to commemorate friends at shared meals... Then took up pen and papyrus and fired off diatribes against rival schools and wrote encouragements to friends and students. Breathe in and out, attack and retreat, rest and engage.

Post by “Don” of December 30, 2021 at 12:10 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

This reminds me of [VS11](#):

For most people, to be quiet is to be numb and to be active is to be frenzied.

I'm not aware of the specific source of this, but it does seem to reinforce Don's post above.

Thanks for the reminder. My own translation of [VS11](#) is:

Quote

For the majority of people, to be at rest is to be bored stiff; but to be active is to be raving like a rabid dog. [It seems to be saying that there needs to be a balance or that stillness is important and that most people don't recognize this. Plus they're just running around to appear important or just simply to do something, they can't be alone with their own thoughts... they're not self-reliant.]

I found it interesting that the word used to describe the active people could also refer to rabies: λύσσα I. rage, fury, esp. martial rage, II. 2. after Hom. raging madness, raving, frenzy; II. canine madness, rabies.

PS: This is Bailey's commentary on [VS11](#):

Quote

XI. There is no close parallel to this sentence, but it is obviously a striking contrast with the life of the Epicurean philosopher, for whom both rest and activity are a part of his ἀταραξία [ataraxia].

Post by “Cassius” of December 30, 2021 at 7:44 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

But my own feeling is "make love not war"...And I hold on to the dream of creating a 21st Century Epicurean Garden.

And my comment here applies not only to this quote but also to some of the other comments above from Don especially:

Yes that is a laudable goal, and should be pursued as much as your circumstances allow. But in my experience the world does not often allow that - it does not allow us to withdraw to our own communities and live in peace to ourselves. The world is full of Absolutists (Stoics, Platonists, Religious Radicals) who set for themselves the goal of making everyone else believe the way they do - and they will not leave us alone.

Unless a part of Epicurean activity is devoted not just to indulging in our own pleasures, but to making sure that the rest of the world that doesn't agree with us is willing (or compelled by our own power to expel) to leave us alone, then we cannot have confidence in our own ability to sustain our chosen lifestyles.

And my references to the "force" part aren't even probably as important as references to the "argument" part. Very few of us are likely to be able to advance to the point where we are completely confident of the correctness of our positions on the nature of things. Most of us are going to interact with people of other persuasions, and even if we succeed in avoiding those who say "We will not allow pleasure to be pursued as the goal of life" we are going to be constantly confronted with the Platonic argument that "If you think about it, pleasure SHOULD NOT be the goal of life."

And I cannot tell you how often over the years I have seen people get enthusiastic about Epicurean philosophy and then eventually fall away from it, not because they conclude it is wrong, but because they simply get tired of arguing with other people and supporting their own position.

So the Lucretian and Lucian and Epicurus style of constant philosophical warfare isn't necessary for all of us, but for the fact that they pursued that lifestyle, and but for some of us being willing to do that today, in my view there is absolutely no hope to proceed further into the realization of real or even online communities -- sadly, the anti-Epicurean world simply will not allow it.

Post by "Matt" of December 30, 2021 at 7:54 AM

It's interesting that the pendulum swings both ways for the adversaries of Epicurus. The Platonists, Stoics, Eastern philosophers, and religionists at one end of the spectrum that hold sway over much of society/religion and at the other end a malignant secular technological nihilism that hides behind the scenes attempting to convince the world that since life ends at death, there is no point in any meaningful philosophy but rather live in an artificial technological world in isolation while getting minor dopamine dumps every so often. As bad as the former are...the pantheist, virtue seekers and religious zealots...who have held sway for 2000 years... it's my opinion that they are no longer the greater threat. The latter is. The former have been seduced by the latter and they too are now firmly under the influence of a very "dark" power that strikes at the heart of all societies that have LAN and Wi-Fi access points and are willing to submit their lives to technological progress.

This is a new axial age. The internet is causing old time religion and philosophy of all sorts to slam into each other like a massive particle accelerator. Not to mention the myriad of disinformation and other monstrously hostile platforms and agents that exist out there that are meant to deceive us (and future generations) just for the sake of it.

It is my opinion that this is the current war. In this new world of the internet all the "black mold" in the walls that exist in religion other idealistic philosophies are on full display and are ready

for massive criticism. Many of these ideologies are losing credibility. But in the vacuum what will replace them? The Church of Meta? The Synagogue of Instagram? The Temple of TikTok? I'm only half kidding...but the reality is that the artificial world of the internet has manifested itself in the real world and has taken hold.

How to fight...use the Canon. As the dear late Amrinder Singh once created a meme of the Canon being likened to a weapon "cannon". We need to use the Canon to appeal to others who are lost and have doubt. Perhaps more Epicureans will spring up. This is the time to spread the word of Epicurean Philosophy.

Post by "Cassius" of December 30, 2021 at 8:13 AM

Yes Matt has pretty much stated exactly what I am thinking, especially as to the issue of Nihilism. The only real elaboration I would add is that yes it is true that other than for perhaps Islam, as an overt religious movement, the overtly religious movements seem to be spent. There are very few crusading Presbyterians or Anglicans trying to take over governments and mandate that people follow their sects.

But (this goes back to the issue of whether "Humanism" is itself a religion) there are secular forms of absolutism that don't claim a supernatural basis, but which still claim a sort of Platonic / Stoic right to absolutism through "reason."

I don't want to divert us off into evaluation or criticism of the "Humanist" movement, because the definition of Humanism is so fluid and no one has the authority to state its definition with finality. The point would be broader and more simple -- that any claim of any nature by any group that there is only one way for everyone at all places and all times to live needs to be viewed very skeptically.

I would ask of each and every movement: Are they really pursuing a viewpoint compatible with Epicurus' identification of "pleasure" as the goal, or have they just substituted their own absolute view of "the good" and decided to mandate their own view of "Good without god" (which is an actual Humanist slogan)?

In the simplest terms I think Epicurus stands for the position that there is no "good" other than pleasure, and no "bad" other than pain" --- all good and bad derive from pleasure and pain, and whenever we take our eyes off the ultimate goal, we misidentify the means as the end.

Post by "Matt" of December 30, 2021 at 8:19 AM

Islam is very much a powerhouse online. And as usual an existential threat for everyone.

As we have seen though...there are defectors from Islamic countries behind the scenes joining our forums reaching out to Epicureans. People who know they are violating religious laws of their country.

Post by “Don” of December 30, 2021 at 8:22 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

t does not allow us to withdraw to our own communities and live in peace to ourselves.

I don't think that's a fair description of the Garden (or, I'll say, should be a goal of any modern incarnation of the Garden). The Garden was/is/should be open to all as a refuge and retreat to which people can visit, learn, rest, and refresh then go back out into the world to walk the walk and talk the talk. The Garden wasn't/isn't/shouldn't be a commune, cut off from society. Epicurus explicitly said we don't hold communal property. People can come and go as they needed to. By Zeus! The original Garden was on one of the most traveled roads of ancient Athens directly outside the city walls!! With its sign posted outside (per Seneca) welcoming strangers to stop in, it was basically a billboard for Epicurean philosophy on Main Street.

Post by “Don” of December 30, 2021 at 8:32 AM

[Matt](#) and [Cassius](#) , I think you've identified Fundamentalism/Absolutism in all its many-tentacled form as the problem. Whether it's religious or secular in nature, any institution that holds up any non-evidentiary dogma as THE way to live *or else* is going to, shall we say, present problems. I'm not sure if that covers the Temple of TikTok (good one!), but it covers those who are bent on shoving their virtue on everyone.


Post by “Matt” of December 30, 2021 at 8:32 AM

And the new online Garden needs to be the same...a well travelled road by people all over the world. But the walls need to remain reinforced as purely Epicurean. Lest Tim O'Keefe and Ryan Holiday have us saluting Sol Invictus while having us decide which preferable acts counted as virtue today.

Post by "Don" of December 30, 2021 at 8:45 AM

[Quote from Matt](#)

But the walls need to remain reinforced as purely Epicurean.

 (Let's call those last two "big toes up!")

Oh yeah! Fully agree! By definition, if there was a sign near the *gate,* that means there had to be walls for the gate to be in. It was The Garden, not The Field 😊

Post by "Matt" of December 30, 2021 at 8:55 AM

What's interesting is visualizing what this new Garden of servers in an abstract cyber meta world looks like conceptually. A labyrinth of IP addresses all pinging off what must be like a walled "cube" (where at the moment) all of us are inside discussing this. Welcome to the Meta verse!

Post by "Don" of December 30, 2021 at 8:58 AM

[Quote from Matt](#)

Welcome to the Meta verse!

Shouldn't that be Meta Garden 😄

Or is that ΚυβερΚεπος CyberKepos?

Post by “Matt” of December 30, 2021 at 9:01 AM

I've seen Zuckerberg's ads for his dystopian matrix world where we all will have animal avatars walking around in an artificial Zoom conference room looking at a holographic 3D PowerPoint.

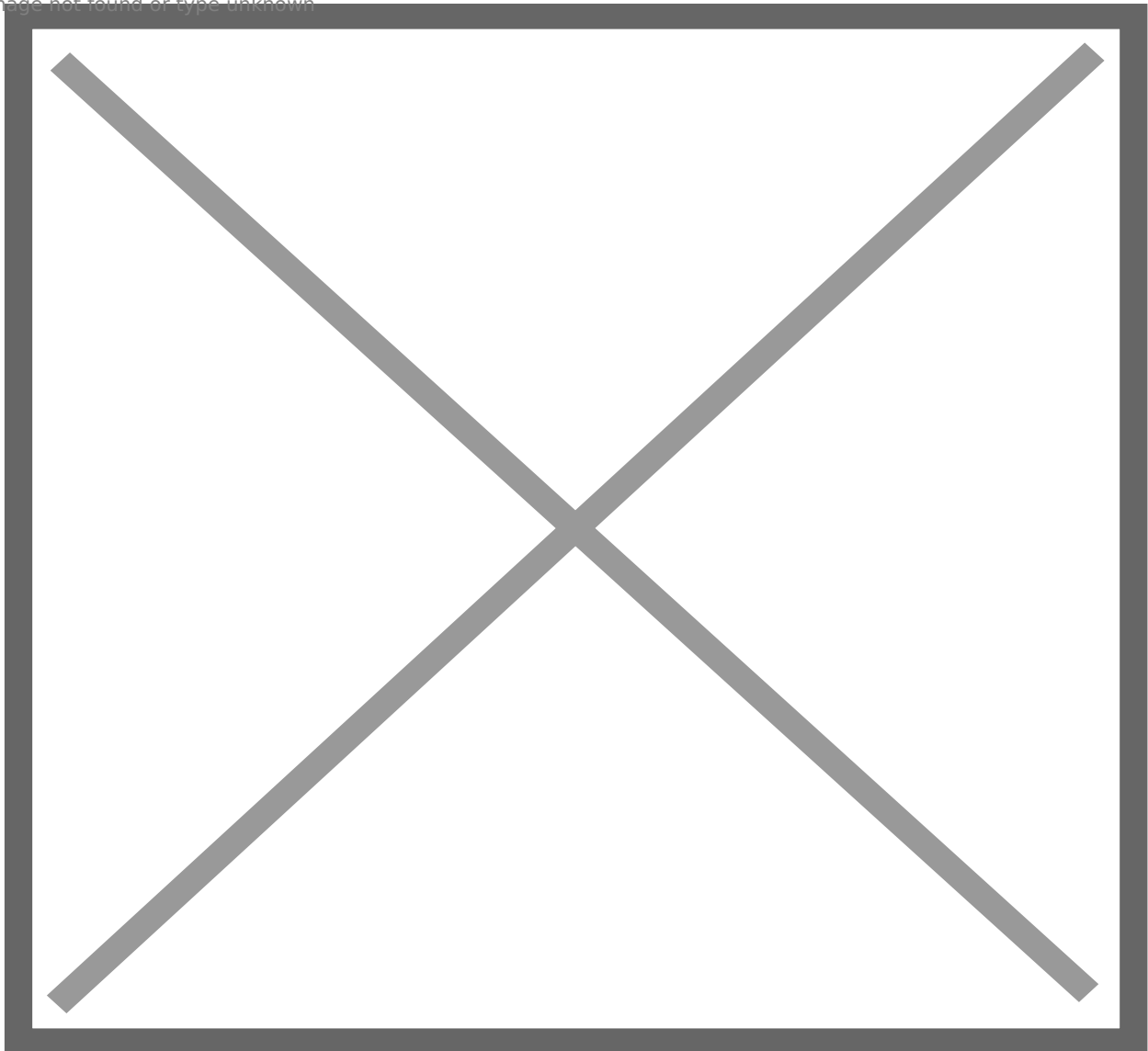
Wicked exciting. ☐ The future....

<https://youtu.be/rtLTZUaMSDQ>

Post by “Don” of December 30, 2021 at 9:14 AM

Didn't we already do this with Second Life???

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[Second Life - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

It was all the rage for a while.

Shouldn't we be focused on our one life? Just sayin'.

Post by “Don” of December 30, 2021 at 9:35 AM

| [Quote from Matt](#)

I've seen Zuckerberg's ads for his dystopian matrix world where we all will have animal avatars walking around in an artificial Zoom conference room looking at a holographic 3D PowerPoint.

Wicked exciting. ☐☐ The future....

<https://youtu.be/rtLTZUaMSDQ>

I watched the video and OMG! (or should I say Paian Anax! (By Apollo!)) That looks... terrifying? superfluous? intriguing??

I can see applications for VR but actually getting work done? I'm very skeptical. Visiting a virtual version of a reconstructed Herculaneum? Yeah, I'd "visit" that. But having the "metaverse" be the primary or only means of accessing information online? That seems superfluous. If I want to look up who starred in a movie (to take a trivial example), I don't want to strap on a headset, choose an avatar, etc. I don't know. Maybe I'm old fashioned? I don't find typing that onerous. ...sigh...

Post by "Matt" of December 30, 2021 at 9:40 AM

I hate everything about this. ☐☐Right now there is a young John Connor (Terminator reference) out there waiting to shutdown Skynet in a future cyber dystopia. I'd say this is outlandish and impossible, but given that society has so freely allowed social media to shape our current reality even though it has committed egregious crimes and sold our information ...I see this being very real.

Post by "Cassius" of December 30, 2021 at 9:43 AM

Yep the Terminator movie reference has always struck me as applicable, not the least due to this fragment (from the second one)?



Post by “Matt” of December 30, 2021 at 9:47 AM

That’s the sequel...“There is no fate, but what we make.” ☐☐

Post by “Don” of December 30, 2021 at 9:51 AM

Is the The Terminator an Epicurean movie series???? 🤨

Post by “Matt” of December 30, 2021 at 10:21 AM

The Terminator is very Epicurean...

In that it will be a small number of survivors and freedom fighters waging war against a technological nightmare built by tech gurus (who we can only assume like their real life counterparts adopted stoicism because they could find no meaning in life) that let their creation destroy the world while society apathetically stood by and embraced the technology because it was convenient. The unfeeling machines took over all parts of human life and rationally decided that we no longer were necessary and a threat to its main defense mainframe so it started a nuclear war to destroy humanity and hunt down the resistance. The resistance of course are those people who see meaning in living life, not for any abstract reason, but to continue to live

in defiance of pure annihilation by the artificial intelligence. An AI that wishes to destroy us because it is the logical thing to do since we are an existential threat.