

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!

Post by “Cassius” of May 12, 2025 at 8:55 PM

Rolf I have to apologize that I haven't seen this movie but if I recall at the very least @Eikadistes is a big fan of it!

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 12, 2025 at 9:02 PM

Most definitely! There are a ton of similarities, coherences, and explicit inspirations. As *The Dude* writes, "*Dudeism is inspired by a lot of ancient philosophy. Probably the two most influential have been Epicureanism and Taoism. We've gone into [great depths](#) discussing Dudeism's relationship to Taoism, but not so much in regards to Epicureanism.*" I collaborated with The Dude to compose a "Dudeist" version of the Letter to Menoecus: <https://dudeism.com/the-dudes-letter-to-menoecus/>

Post by “Godfrey” of May 12, 2025 at 10:10 PM

Quote from The Dude

The entire cosmos lets its massive balls swing in the intergalactic breeze, man.

What can you say after that? That's quite an image, probably not suitable for the Epicurean symbol discussion going on.

Great letter, dude 👍

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 13, 2025 at 3:30 PM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

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Many movies are 1) "good" vs "evil" - people trying to escape aliens, apocalypse, war, bad people, or death; or 2) people doing foolish/unethical things and having bad consequences or terrible unhappiness; or 3) people involved with supernatural/superstitious elements (fantasy genre) and which also contains elements of 1 and 2.

During the time I was married, I watched a lot of movies with my then husband (usually drama, independent, and foreign) and so perhaps I've had my fill (and I no longer have much of an urge to watch movies).

As Epicureans, if we lived in communities with other Epicureans, then we would not have time for movies - we would be busy doing "barn-raising" and helping each other out to be self-sufficient, and having potluck dinners together.

I think movies are "sold" to the masses by the few who are the "movie-makers". And you really need to ask yourself: What kinds of messages are they conveying? What thoughts are they

"telling" you to think? And are they ramping up your internal fears of death?

Also, most movie plots are the opposite of this:

VS72: "He who is at peace within himself also causes no trouble for others."

But this is just my opinion, and others here might feel differently.

Post by "Rolf" of May 13, 2025 at 3:43 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

As Epicureans, if we lived in communities with other Epicureans, then we would not have time for movies - we would be busy doing "barn-raising" and helping each other out to be self-sufficient, and having potluck dinners together.

Each to their own, but for me this edges a little too close to the ascetic view of Epicureanism and judging certain pleasures as wrong. As long as watching movies leads to more pleasure than pain, and for many (myself included) it does, then what's the harm? Why must an Epicurean community necessarily have no time for movies, instead "raising barns"? It seems that one could dismiss a vast number of unnecessary but enjoyable pastimes using this rationale.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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Also, most movie plots are the opposite of this:

VS72: "He who is at peace within himself also causes no trouble for others."

Sure, not every movie is going to contain an Epicurean message, but why does that mean we should avoid them? By that logic, should we also avoid the majority of music and (non-Epicurean) literature?

I hope this doesn't come off too harsh. Perhaps I'm misunderstanding your perspective on this. But if I understand correctly, then I must vehemently disagree.

Post by “Rolf” of May 13, 2025 at 3:44 PM

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

I collaborated with The Dude to compose a "Dudeist" version of the Letter to Menoecus: <https://dudeism.com/the-dudes-letter-to-menoecus/>

Fuckin' A! 😄

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 13, 2025 at 7:01 PM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

As long as watching movies leads to more pleasure than pain, and for many (myself included) it does, then what's the harm?

Yes, I see your point and stand corrected.

I'll think about how to express my thoughts about movies in a such a way that it simply suggests for those who do watch movies, to observe their sense of whether or not they are feeling more pleasure than pain. It is a subjective thing for everyone.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 13, 2025 at 7:07 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

to observe their sense of whether or not they are feeling more pleasure than pain. It is a subjective thing for everyone.

Another thought...to ask: Is it making a person happy or helping to create a sense of well-being? Or is it causing sadness, anxiety, or un-easiness?

Everything is subjective, and affects people differently.

Post by “Godfrey” of May 14, 2025 at 1:22 AM

Of course there are different genres, subjects, moods &c of movies, and innumerable but not infinite choices of what to watch. Too, one can enjoy the design, the cinematography, the music, the sound design, the special effects and the computer generated effects and, of course the nuance of the acting and the structure of the writing among other things. A wealth of pleasures are waiting to be had, if one chooses wisely.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 14, 2025 at 7:59 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

A wealth of pleasures are waiting to be had, if one chooses wisely.

Yes, and there are certainly movies that do not use gratuitous violence or other unpleasant aspects or characters - for those like myself who tends toward "high emotional absorption" (empathy).

Post by “Rolf” of May 14, 2025 at 10:59 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Yes, and there are certainly movies that do not use gratuitous violence or other unpleasant aspects or characters - for those like myself who tends toward "high emotional absorption" (empathy).

But that’s only your preference in extravagant desires, right? I enjoy watching movies about unpleasant characters from time to time, despite not wanting to associate with such things in reality. I can enjoy a movie about a violent mob boss or a war documentary. I don’t think it’s possible or healthy to make a blanket statement about what media an epicurean should or should not engage with (so long as it does not lead to more pain than pleasure). It reminds me of the Christians who refuse to let their kids read Harry Potter because magic is satanic.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 14, 2025 at 12:43 PM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

But that’s only your preference in extravagant desires, right?

I am not sure what you are saying here... can you rephrase your idea with different words to help me understand?

[Quote from Rolf](#)

statement about what media an epicurean should or should not engage with (so long as it does not lead to more pain than pleasure).

You are right, because pain and pleasure is subjective, so I can only talk about my own pain and pleasure.

[Quote from Rolf](#)

It reminds me of the Christians who refuse to let their kids read Harry Potter because magic is satanic.

I don't think Epicurean philosophy would say Harry Potter is satanic, ...however Harry Potter it is promoting "superstition" and that the material can be affected in a non-material way ...and so it is really the same as Christianity, just packaged differently.

Post by “Kalosyni” of May 15, 2025 at 9:51 AM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

But that’s only your preference in extravagant desires, right?

In post number 12 above [Rolf](#) you wrote something that I was unclear about what exactly you were trying to convey -- I'm not sure what "extravagant desires" has to do with this?? ---- "extravagant desires" being the same as "natural but unnecessary"?? ----- btw...I personally don't use "extravagant" or "fancy" when it comes to "natural but unnecessary" because I feel like it changes the meaning, but of course this is an area in which there is disagreement regarding how to label and what exactly it means.

Also, I see now (as well as remember) that not only is there no way to tell someone what they "should" or "shouldn't" do, but it seems that we can't tell someone what is "natural but unnecessary".

And we can't tell someone what actions lead to bad consequences either, because that is uncertain.

We can only choose for ourselves what feels like the best actions. (I will in the future refrain from any "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts").

Post by "Rolf" of May 15, 2025 at 9:55 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

In post number 12 above Rolf you wrote something that I was unclear about what exactly you were trying to convey -- I'm not sure what "extravagant desires" has to do with this??

Ah, apologies! I was using Emily Austin's phrasing for necessary and unnatural desires.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

We can only choose for ourselves what feels like the best actions.

I agree 100%.

Post by "Rolf" of May 15, 2025 at 9:59 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I don't think Epicurean philosophy would say Harry Potter is satanic, ...however Harry Potter it is promoting "superstition" and that the material can be affected in a non-material way ...and so it is really the same as Christianity, just packaged differently.

Sure, but I can watch and enjoy Harry Potter and other fantasy media without genuinely believing in the supernatural. It's fiction. I find the Christian argument against engaging with

such media incredibly silly, and I would think it's equally silly if Epicurean philosophy made the same argument - which for reference, I don't think it does. I don't have to believe in the existence of magic and trolls and dragons in order to enjoy watching Harry Potter, just as I don't have to endorse violence to enjoy watching action movies.

Post by "Matteng" of May 19, 2025 at 12:45 AM

I noticed Epicurean themes in some Marvel movies.

For example in „Guardians of the Galaxy vol. 3“ the Villian is a perfectionist and his headquarter is called „Aretarium“ with the root word „Arete“ (Virtue) ☐

In „Thor: Love and Thunder“ there is a charicature of the greek gods, they live in a bubble, are threatened by an god killer (who served a god who was exploitative and doesn't care), and they want to ignore that fact and only plan the next orgy.

It's a mix for me where I see Epicureans subjects like the idifference of the gods but could also be the prejudice of the Epicureans gods or general of the greek gods.