

Happy Twentieth of June, 2018!

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“We should look for someone to eat and drink with before looking for something to eat and drink, for dining alone is leading the life of a lion or wolf.” – Epicurus

This month, the Guardian published [The friend effect: why the secret of health and happiness is surprisingly simple](#). This, plus the above quote by Epicurus, present us with an occasion and an excuse to randomly invite friends over for dinner, to cook and eat together, or have brunch together, and presents a powerful case in favor of developing culinary and brunch traditions with our friends.

An essay titled [The Evolution of Law in Epicurus and Nietzsche](#) was published, as was a book review of [Revolt of the Angels](#), which inspired some Epicurean thoughts on the [curious evolution of Satanism into a mainstream religion](#).

If you're on twitter, you may follow me on twitter at @Hclasalle, and you may also follow @SocietyEpicurus and @NewEpicurean.

Also this month, NASA announced the [conclusive discovery of organic compounds on planet Mars](#), which inaugurates a new era in the science of astrobiology and gets contemporary science closer to confirming the Epicurean doctrine of innumerable worlds, which was articulated in Epicurus' [Epistle to Herodotus](#), and later in [Diogenes of Oenoanda's Wall](#) and in Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*, which says:

“It is in the highest degree unlikely that this earth and sky is the only one to have been created ... Nothing in the universe is the only one of its kind, unique and solitary in its birth and growth ... You are bound therefore to acknowledge that in other regions there are other earths and various tribes of men and breeds of beasts.” – *Lucretius, in De Rerum Natura, Book II*

Some years back, in a piece written for the classics publication *Eidolon* titled [Swinish Herds and Pastafarians](#)—which explores the continuity between ancient comedy and modern atheist activism—I explained that ancient Epicureans treated their philosophy, at times, as a parody religion complete with its own version of heaven and their own criteria for who gets in and who does not. Recently, someone on our Facebook groups mentioned the comedy [Icaromenippus](#):

[An Aerial Expedition](#) and how in this work, Lucian of Samosata—in a scene where his main character flies to the moon and looks back—took for granted that the Earth was round.

Imagine yourself first descrying a tiny Earth, far smaller than the Moon looks; on turning my eyes down, I could not think for some time what had become of our mighty mountains and vast sea.

His point was that this demonstrates that the ancient Epicureans of the second century of Common Era believed in a round Earth. In fact, Lucian has been credited (here, and in his *True Story*) with writing the earliest examples of science fiction in the history of literature. I read the work, and found more of the kind of secular mocking of vulgar religion discussed in the *Eidolon* piece. Lucian speaks out against creationists:

Some say it had no beginning, and cannot end; others boldly talk of its creator and his procedure; what particularly entertained me was that these latter set up a contriver of the universe, but fail to mention where he came from, or what he stood on while about his elaborate task, though it is by no means obvious how there could be place or time before the universe came into being.

Lucian elsewhere pokes fun at the overconfidence of the philosophers:

To begin with, their feet are on the ground; they are no taller than the rest of us 'men that walk the earth'; they are no sharper-sighted than their neighbours, some of them purblind, indeed, with age or indolence; and yet they say they can distinguish the limits of the sky, they measure the sun's circumference, take their walks in the supra-lunar regions, and specify the sizes and shapes of the stars as though they had fallen from them; often one of them could not tell you correctly the number of miles from Megara to Athens, but has no hesitation about the distance in feet from the sun to the moon.

And another portion of the work reminded me of the [Pale Blue Dot](#) sermon given by Carl Sagan. Lucian's pale blue dot sermon questioned the pride men take in petty things, and compared cities to anthills.

The whole of Greece, as I then saw it, might measure some four inches; how much smaller Athens on the same scale. So I realized what sort of sized basis for their pride remains to our rich men.

In a scene where the main character sits next to Zeus while listening to the prayers of men, Lucian served another brilliant satire of religion:

From every quarter of Earth were coming the most various and contradictory petitions; for I too bent down my head and listened. Here are specimens. 'O Zeus,

that I might be king!’ ‘O Zeus, that my onions and garlic might thrive!’ ‘Ye Gods, a speedy death for my father!’ Or again, ‘Would that I might succeed to my wife’s property!’ ‘Grant that my plot against my brother be not detected.’ ‘Let me win my suit.’ ‘Give me an Olympic garland.’ Of those at sea, one prayed for a north, another for a south wind; the farmer asked for rain, the fuller for sun.

One of the points I made in the [Swinish Herds](#) piece, and later in my [Epicureanism as a Religious Identity](#) blog, was that the Epicurean tradition exhibits—even if at times robed in comedy and humor—many of the symptoms of being a religious tradition, complete with a foundational exile story (in his case, from Mytilene) like Muhammad’s hajj, Rama’s expulsion from his father’s castle, and Moses’ exodus. The flight to heaven motif is also a theme in Elijah, Muhammad (who flew to the seven heavens), Jesus (the “transfiguration” at Gethsemani), and other great prophets.

While Icaromenippus takes place in Lucian’s comedy and is not meant to be taken seriously, it’s fully consistent with Epicurean tradition to have fun while philosophizing, while encouraging critical thinking, and while creating meaning.

At one and the same time we must philosophize, laugh, and manage our household and other business, while never ceasing to proclaim the words of true philosophy. –
Vatican Saying 41

I hope you go on this adventure and fly to the heavens with Lucian, and that you eventually get to enjoy the pleasure of his other works: [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#) (where he mocks a false prophet), [True Story](#) (another wildly entertaining out-of-this-world adventure), and his hilarious [Sale of Creeds](#).

Further Reading:

[In Praise of Lucian](#)

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