

Joshua's "Only The Beginning" Observation

Post by "Joshua" of January 9, 2022 at 3:20 PM

One question we often get asked is, 'What are some Epicurean practices I can use in everyday life?'

Part of the reason this is difficult to answer is that *I don't know what the pursuit of a life of pleasure looks like to you.*

Probably, we find different things pleasureable! I could point to the latest research, or to some scrap of an ancient text; I could offer some healthful lifestyle tips, or I could tell you about things that have seemed pleasurable to me but which have brought more pain or trouble in the end; but I cannot tell you what brings *you* pleasure.

If you're at square one, as we all are in a sense, here are a few things you can try: I say try, because they might fail!

1. Keep a journal. O, how I wish I was the kind of person who kept a journal! Traveling to Europe on *aes alia*, another's coin, was exceedingly pleasureable---but that was over a decade ago. And then the bill came due; and as I gradually paid the debt, the memories gradually faded. If you want to remember happy things, pleasureable things--write them down. Epicurus thought that pleasures remembered were pleasures still experienced, and stored away for future use. But you'll forget them, so write things down! The people you encounter are talking about you---talk to yourself about them.

2. Go for a walk. The community I live in has a Facebook page, and there are rumors circulating about a sinister hooded figure walking around alone by night. Maybe I should get a dog. But the point is, nobody seems to *ambulate* anymore! Breathe the free air, look at the trees and the flowers and the running water! They'll gossip, but I don't think they'll arrest you for it!

3. Stargaze. The *lunatic* who walks around in my neighborhood has even been noticed ducking into the woods, staring anxiously at a bird, or---ye gods forbend!---gazing up at the night sky! Is he a madman? Is he a drunk? No! He's an Epicurean! The closest star system (alpha centauri) is just over four light years away; while I was having lunch with an old friend at an Indian restaurant in western Iowa in two-thousand-seventeen, the photons I see tonight began their long pointless journey toward Florida. Go catch some of them.

4. Have lunch with an old friend. Pleasure is the good of life, and friendship the very best of that good. Tell them about that bird you were staring at the other day. If I'm lucky, it might even make the Facebook page!

5. Read a book. Half of Epicurus' Principle Doctrines were direct contradictions of Plato. Are you sure you want to take Epicurus' word for it? Maybe it's time to brush up on your Plato.

Drink some tea, pet a goat, listen to a thought-provoking podcast, play a thought-provoking video game---there's a pleasure-filled life of joy at your finger tips. I don't know what's in that life, but I hope you find it.

Everything you see and everything you are is made of atoms that were forged out of smaller particles in the heart of dying stars. It's a wondrous universe--go out (or stay in) and enjoy it! You and I are very, very lucky to have this chance. Sink every root you have deep into the experiences of this world, and the branches that flourish from that will be lovely--a fit abode even for my friend the bird.

Quote

The Heron

O Heron wan in water wading!
Thou opus of untailed fashion—
Sure-footed on the shoreline's footing—
A tulle train, dawnlight's glisten,
Gowns thy form in matchless morning!
Heron! Ready in verdure reedy—
Agéd angler, weedmidst waiting,
Patient, still in silence stolen
From the olden deep unending
'Til the wide world's wild breaking—
Hunter haunting on the march and
interstice of world and world;
Sea and sky, blade of beak
Azure upon azure rending—
Virtue of a vise unyielding.
What crooked timber frames thy neck?

Methinks that it is not so stiff.
Whence the whittling of thy wing?
What the aurum of thine eye?
Where, thy heartblood's ceaseless spring?
Are thou Plato's man-of-gold,
Who rules a tribe of bronzed fins?
Or yet a hermit cynical,
Who tossed aside his needless dish?
Is this thy sandy portico?
Nay, for thou art too like me:
We bear the stamp of origins.
Fatherless thou wert so feathered,
Motherless milked on thy sweet streams,
And here, alone, we stand together—
No more! Aye, fly! Fly to thine pleasure
Great noble bird, sun-midst sailing,
Prow a-gleaming, southward seeking;
Seek thee still a sweeter shore
And I, a sweet philosophy.
Yet I will linger here a time
Tasting of the morning's fruits—
'Ere long the yawning sea shall call:
The tide shall fail, and then the light,
And we shall mingle, you and I
Void with void, and mote with mote
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