

Is Epicurean life achievable only for well off?

Post by "Cassius" of September 19, 2022 at 1:37 PM

My first comment Waterholic is that you are in tune with what I think the majority of us on this forum see as the best interpretation of Epicurus. I'll refer several times to "us" collectively, and I don't want that to be taken too literally, but you should see the same tone written clearly in our documentation setting out the nature and purpose of the website and the views of Epicurus that are behind it.

The call to not live beyond one's means is not a call to asceticism, and I agree completely that working with and assisting our close friends is a significant part of the equation for living happily. I am not as conversant with the details of some of the Philodemus material (on property management) as I would like to be, but what I know about it is consistent with as you describe it "reconciling" the philosophy to the real world.

But I would say that the issue is not really "reconciling" Epicurus with the demands of the real world. I think Epicurus has always been in exactly the right place on these issues, and it is rather the ascetic interpreters of Epicurus who have had him wrong from the beginning.

Once again we're needing to take sides on whether the Romans were "bad Epicureans" (I strongly believe they were NOT bad Epicureans) but you can see in the lifestyles of the known Epicureans of that period that they lived normal and even well-to-do lives when circumstances allowed it. It's not the Romans who misinterpreted Epicurus, it is those who argue that Epicurus said we must only pursue what is absolutely necessary in life.

This has been a theme of many of our recent discussion and also recent episodes of the Lucretius Today podcast. Since you are new to the group I bet you will find reading and listening to some of these recent discussions helpful in showing that "we" are (I think) largely in agreement with you concern. But the concern is not a contradiction in Epicurean philosophy, it's rather in 2000 years of non-Epicurean and anti-Epicurean propaganda. The crowning refutation of which, I think you are perceptive in observing, was Epicurus' own will and the information it gives us about his property at death. Either Epicurus was a supreme hypocrite, preaching minimalism while living large, or SOMEONE is feeding the world the wrong interpretation of Epicurean philosophy. And as you read more on the website it should soon become clear that "we" don't consider Epicurus to have been a supreme hypocrite.