

# How has the word epicurean come to mean excess?

Post by “Don” of May 13, 2023 at 5:28 PM

Here's the entry from the Oxford English Dictionary with its historical citations:

Noun

A person devoted to sensual pleasure, esp. to eating and drinking; a hedonist; a glutton. In later use also: a person who cultivates a refined taste for, or takes a particular pleasure in, fine food and drink; an epicure. In early use chiefly depreciative.

a1450 (►c1435) J. Lydgate *Life SS. Edmund & Fremund* (Harl.) l. 225 in C. Horstmann *Altengl. Legenden* (1881) 2nd Ser. 381 (MED) Fals lust..of epicuriens.

a1475 (►?a1430) J. Lydgate tr. G. Deguileville *Pilgrimage Life Man* (Vitell.) l. 12786 'I wolde se What Epicuriens sholde be.'..'That perfytt ffelycyte Ys, that a man lyk hys delyt, ffolwe alway hys appetyt.'

a1572 J. Knox *Hist. Reformation Scotl.* (1587) 188 Simon Preston..a right Epicurian.

a1652 J. Smith *Select Disc.* (1660) i. iii. 21 Those poor brutish Epicureans that have nothing but the meer husks of fleshly pleasure to feed themselves with.

1728 S. Whatley tr. J. Lenfant *Hist. Council of Constance* l. 577 Jerome was such an Epicurean in his Prison, that he spent his whole Time in Drunkenness and Gluttony.

1825 W. Scott *Talisman x, in Tales Crusaders* III. 250 He was a voluptuary and an epicurean.

1855 J. L. Motley *Rise Dutch Republic* l. ii. i. 256 A horde of lazy epicureans, telling beads and indulging themselves in luxurious vice.

1935 *Washington Post* 16 Oct. 5 There are a few real epicureans of the table.

2008 *National Jeweler* 1 Oct. 18 It [sc. chocolate] has become a bonbon for adults, to be savored by epicureans.

Adjective:

Originally: devoted to the pursuit of pleasure; (hence) hedonistic, gluttonous. Now chiefly: designating a person who takes a particular pleasure in fine food and drink; characteristic of, or suitable for, such a person; gourmet. Cf. epicure n. 2.

1583 W. Chauncie tr. P. Viret *Worlde Possessed with Devils* ii. sig. F.vi Their Epicurian life [Fr. leur vie Epicurienne], giuen ouer to al filthinesse and enormitie.

1612 C. Demetrius tr. *Most True Relation Earth-quake* sig. B2v All at their plenteous and Epicurean voluptuous tables, fall to drinking, swilling, and carousing deepe healths.

a1616 W. Shakespeare *Antony & Cleopatra* (1623) ii. i. 24 Epicurean Cookes, Sharpen with cloylesse sawce his Appetite.

1641 J. Milton *Of Reformation* 84 Warming their Palace Kitchins, and from thence their unctuous, and epicurean paunches.

1656 A. Cowley Misc. 37 in *Poems Voluptuous, and Wise with all, Epicuraean Animal!*

1750 *Student* 1 No. 6. 214 I'll be temperate, and stoutly withstand all the allurements of delicious fare, and the seducements of epicurean companions.

1765 *Parasite* II. xvii. 204 He dined at the Twopence Halfpenny Ordinary in Newgate Street (which we cannot suppose to have been a very Epicurean Meal).

1826 *Monitor* (Sydney) 15 Dec. 245/3 He who has fed upon corn for six-months, can eat a 'fat cake', with a true epicurean relish.

1850 T. Carlyle *Latter-day Pamphlets* vi. 15 No longer an earnest Nation, but a light, sceptical epicurean one.

1856 H. Penciller *Rural Life in Amer.* viii. 222 An epicurean fare we lived on, too.

1934 G. Ross *Tips on Tables* 37 An entree to delight any epicurean soul.

1954 *Life* 1 Feb. 44/2 Fancy preparing an epicurean feast so fast!

2008 *IPA Rev.* (Austral.) July 11/2 Slow food is not just an epicurean delight—it is a political and ideological movement.