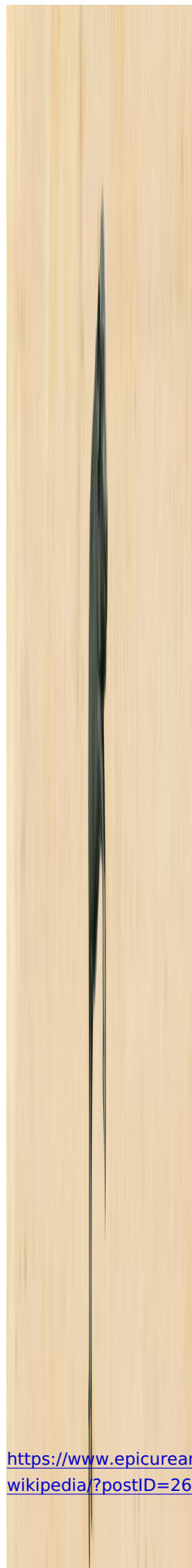


# The Description of Epicurean Philosophy On Wikipedia

**Post by “Cassius” of October 4, 2023 at 4:03 PM**

Kalosyni recently posted a thread to comment on a description of Epicurean Philosophy on Reddit, and it seems like it might be a good idea to have a similar thread as to the description of Epicurean philosophy on Wikipedia. This is a topic that has been discussed more than one, including here:



Blog Article

## [Parsing The Wikipedia Introduction To Epicurus As Of February 6, 2020](#)

Below is the Wikipedia introduction to Epicurus as of 02/06/20. I will highlight in red, and add a footnote to each statement which I contend is in serious need of correction or amplification.

[...]

[1] Calling Epicurus a "sage" adds nothing, but injects confusion, suggesting that this term denotes some status that is important the reader should know about in this context, which is not correct.

[2] Eating simple means and discussing a wide variety of philosophical subject is what they were known...



Cassius

June 6, 2020 at 9:22 AM

As of this date (early October, 2023) here is the section on Ethics:

[pasted-from-clipboard.png](#)

This post isn't adding anything new to the subject, just making it easier to find. Here are some current comments:

1. I question the addition of adding "morally" to pleasure being good and evil, as it sounds like a concession to Platonic idealism that there is an absolute morality. Pleasure is desirable and pain is undesirable because Nature gave us feelings that work that way, not because there is an intrinsic standard of "morality."
2. I strongly disapprove of implying that "he idiosyncratically defined pleasure as the absence of suffering" without the full explanation that pleasure is EVERY activity in life that is not painful. The formulation is easily and justifiably twisted into asceticism / buddhism / etc.
3. I strongly disapprove of stating baldly that "ataraxia" is what "all humans should seek to attain." This requires much more explanation.
4. While I think it has its uses I strongly disapprove of elevating the Tetrapharmakos as a primary "summary of the key points of Epicurean ethics." "What is terrible is easy to endure" was never stated by Epicurus and is borderline offensive. (And I question whether I should hedge with "borderline.")
5. I expect that the wording that Epicurus "strongly disapproved of raw excessive sensuality" will be misinterpreted as implying that he strongly disapproved of all sensuality.

6. The way this is written I think that implying that a "single piece of cheese can be equally pleasing as an entire feast" will also be misinterpreted as overly-minimalist asceticism.

Most of these statements can be reworked and explained in a satisfactory way, just like Epicurus uses "gods" and "virtue" in acceptable ways. But the big problem is this:

When you pull concepts out of context and drop them in the laps of people whose mentality has been conditioned by religion and orthodox "humanism" to operate in a context totally opposed to Epicurus' viewpoints, you end up with a total misrepresentation.

That's exactly the technique Cicero is using in "On Ends" to disparage Epicurean philosophy. He knows that his readers don't understand Epicurus' sweeping definition of pleasure, and so he ignores Epicurus' definition and acts as if Epicurus is an alien from another planet.

Like Cicero, the people writing this wikipedia article very likely know that "pleasure is the absence of pain" will be interpreted by at least 90% of their readers as some kind of Buddhist / Stoic asceticism, aloofness, and detachment. To leave it unsaid that Epicurus was advocating the \*opposite\* of asceticism and aloofness and detachment is not doing justice either to Epicurus or to the reader.

Unless you close the door firmly on the kind of misrepresentation that Cicero is advocating you never make any progress with the people who are studying Epicurus in good faith. You leave them convinced that there IS no explanation and that all viewpoints are equally valid, as seems to be the goal of the Talmudic approach.

In fairness to Cicero, however, or just ironically, we wouldn't have the very explicit explanation that Torquatus does provide us on these issues if Cicero had not included them in his argument against them. Cicero may have scored points for his side in 50BC, but in preserving the core explanation of Epicurus' view of pleasure he preserved critical material that we otherwise wouldn't have. So I am glad we have Cicero, but we now have the ability to move forward with restating the core material with more clarity.