

Bread And Water - Debunking The Myth of Epicurean Asceticism - By Don Boozer

Post by “Al-Hakiim von Grof” of January 21, 2025 at 11:03 PM

I really enjoyed this presentation! Many thanks to [Don](#) for putting it together.

I was reminded of my experiences fasting (for general health and specific GI problems I have) and how, upon feeding after multiple days of only consuming water, my hunger was for the simple things. I didn't desire a fancy meal with complex flavors, I desired “meat and potatoes” kinds of meals; I would frequently break my fasts with steak and eggs, or ground beef and sweet potato, or other such simple yet nourishing foods. And I'll tell you what, those meals were supremely satisfying - more satisfying than any luxurious meal I'd eaten in the course of a more standard three-meal-per-day feeding schedule. It's my lived experience of the natural limit of pleasure.

What fasting also taught me was *true hunger*. I firmly believe that most people in the developed world don't actually know what hunger feels like. They confuse cravings with hunger due to the unnatural abundance of hyper-stimulating food in our modern environment. I believe these cravings are what is referenced when people claim “there is no limit to pleasure”. But they miss that unhealthy and disproportionate cravings come from an unhealthy mind; with a proper perspective on food, its purpose, and an experience of what hunger really is one comes to realize how the pleasure of satisfying true hunger to its extreme requires only simple and easily obtainable foods.

Now, given that we're Epicureans, it's obvious that we'd accept and even promote the prudent consumption of delicious meals. The point is to recognize the ease and simplicity with which *hunger*, as opposed to *craving*, is satisfied. I believe this perspective shift allows the luxurious meals to be consumed with even more appreciation, but it also allows for one to walk away from the banquet table content, and helps one avoid consuming with gluttonous abandon. In short, it fosters prudent choices regarding food and satiety, which in turn fosters health of mind and body.

In contrast, the ascetic approach - which fetishizes self-denial and makes a virtue of suffering - fosters a sort of disproportionate estimation of the impact and value of consuming luxurious meals - or partaking in any other sensuous experience for that matter.

The root of such a confused perspective is the false duality of mind/soul and body as antagonists to one another. Such thinking can be dismissed as a load of bull. One need only refer to their lived experience to prove otherwise. We've all experienced the mind altering and personality shifting effects of a neglected body; with poor sleep, a garbage diet, and a lack of

adequate physical exertion, the mind suffers significantly. So too does the body suffer (as modern science shows) when the mind suffers through chronic stress, isolation, and mental abuse.

The two components form one holistic, interdependent unit. The ascetic attempt to pit one against the other under false pretenses, especially those of supernatural gain (the most common reason most practice some form of asceticism), only serves to undermine the function of the unit and needlessly increases the suffering of the human organism. At best, asceticism leads to a life under-lived. At worst, it all but kills you. In either case, it's a practice all should avoid if you wish to live your most pleasing life.