

What place does "simple" have in Epicureanism?

Post by "Don" of January 23, 2025 at 2:29 PM

Here's the section from my recent talk:

Did the Epicureans follow a simple, plain, frugal lifestyle? Yes, from all descriptions they appeared to live a simple, plain, frugal lifestyle... NOT unlike other average ancient Greeks of the time. Not "spartan," not "ascetic," not a life of self-denial! Simple, plain, frugal. Frugal doesn't mean self-denial.

Words and phrases along these lines often associated with the school were:

Simplici victu = They led a simple, plain way of life

οἱ τε λιτοὶ χυλοὶ = They had simple, inexpensive, frugal flavors and tastes

Καλιάδα = a simple cottage (Philodemus' description of his apartments in the lavish estate of Piso)

εὐτελέστατα καὶ λιτότατα διαιτώμενοι = lead one's life in a manner that was easily paid for and simple, inexpensive, and frugal.

To me, this doesn't sound like self-denial or asceticism. It sounds like common sense! It sounds like Epicurus is reminding people to live within their means!