

# Why pursue unnecessary desires?

Post by "Joshua" of May 8, 2025 at 12:17 AM

On the topic of desires, I do want to mention Ben Jonson's play [The Alchemist](#). When the master of a London townhouse travels for his health, the servant he leaves behind falls into company with rogues, and they devise a number of schemes to cheat, swindle, and con their way to fortune. In one of these cons, the mark is a man named Sir Epicure Mammon, whose deep longing for the easy riches he hopes will be procured with the acquisition of the alchemical *magnum opus* - the legendary Philosopher's Stone - leaves him prey to a farcical series of embarrassments.

Here is Sir Epicure waxing poetic as he describes the panoply of his desires;

For I do mean  
To have a list of wives and concubines,  
Equal with Solomon, who had the stone  
Alike with me; and I will make me a back  
With the elixir, that shall be as tough  
As Hercules, to encounter fifty a night.

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I will have all my beds blown up, not stuf;  
Down is too hard: and then, mine oval room  
Fill'd with such pictures as Tiberius took  
From Elephantis, and dull Aretine  
But coldly imitated. Then, my glasses  
Cut in more subtle angles, to disperse  
And multiply the figures, as I walk  
Naked between my succubae. My mists  
I'll have of perfume, vapour'd 'bout the room,  
To lose ourselves in; and my baths, like pits  
To fall into; from whence we will come forth,  
And roll us dry in gossamer and roses.

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And my flatterers  
Shall be the pure and gravest of divines,  
That I can get for money. My mere fools,  
Eloquent burgesses, and then my poets  
The same that writ so subtly of the fart,

Whom I will entertain still for that subject.  
The few that would give out themselves to be  
Court and town-stallions, and, each-where, bely  
Ladies who are known most innocent for them;  
Those will I beg, to make me eunuchs of:  
And they shall fan me with ten estrich tails  
A-piece, made in a plume to gather wind.  
We will be brave, Puffe, now we have the med'cine.  
My meat shall all come in, in Indian shells,  
Dishes of agat set in gold, and studded  
With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies.  
The tongues of carps, dormice, and camels' heels,  
Boil'd in the spirit of sol, and dissolv'd pearl,  
Apicius' diet, 'gainst the epilepsy:  
And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,  
Headed with diamond and carbuncle.  
My foot-boy shall eat pheasants, calver'd salmons,  
Knots, godwits, lampreys: I myself will have  
The beards of barbels served, instead of sallads;  
Oil'd mushrooms; and the swelling unctuous paps  
Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,  
Drest with an exquisite, and poignant sauce;  
For which, I'll say unto my cook, "There's gold,  
Go forth, and be a knight."