

# Episode 295 - Plutarch's Absurd Interpretation of Epicurean Absence of Pain

Post by “Cassius” of August 19, 2025 at 10:24 AM

This podcast will be out either later today or tomorrow at the latest. One note I want to make before finishing the edit is that there is a particular segment that I think can be highly useful to us in future Zoom meetings, probably also on the twentieth.

Here is [a segment from Non Posse 7](#), with the speaker sarcastically attacking the Epicureans:

## Quote

Have they not reason, think you, to value themselves for such things as these, and to talk as they are wont when they style themselves immortals and equals to Gods?—and when, through the excessiveness and transcendency of the blessed things they enjoy, they rave even to the degree of whooping and hollering for very satisfaction that, to the shame of all mortals, they have been the only men that could find out this celestial and divine good that lies in an exemption from all evil.

There's more before and after this quote that makes it clear that Plutarch is trying to caricature the Epicureans for praising absence of pain so highly, and I think the proper response is to caricature him right back.

Plutarch thinks it is a persuasive argument to say that Epicurus held that the goal and best thing to do in life is sip a little water and nibble a bit of cheese.

That's hogwash, and Plutarch knows it.

The absurdity of saying that Epicurus taught this is obvious, but the even greater absurdity is that so many modern Epicureans have accepted this characterization as accurate.

Sarcasm can be used by all sides to this debate, and I am going to make it a standard part of my discussion of Epicurean philosophy to play act examples of this absurdity. Neither my life nor Epicurus' nor any other Epicureans' life is summed up in the act of nibbling cheese or sipping water, but to act as if it is will serve to illustrate the absurdity of it. For those who are willing to see the absurdity, caricaturing it by taking Plutarch's argument to its literal extreme --- whooping and hollering about the ecstatic experience of a sip of water or a bite of cheese --- will help break down one of the worst misrepresentations of Epicurean teaching.