

'Their God Is The Belly' / "The Root of All Good Is The Pleasure Of The Stomach" And Similar Attributions

Post by "Don" of November 25, 2025 at 2:14 PM

I'm in agreement with [Bryan](#) and [Eikadistes](#) in their posts above. Additionally...

[Quote from Cassius](#)

whether the alleged statement has analogs in the core texts

We have SO few extant core texts from card-carrying Epicureans that we have to rely on what's reported fragmentarily in other ancient authors. I want to take a look at the lineage of those fragments in U409:

- [Metrodorus - quoted letter by Plutarch - 330-278 BCE]
- Cicero - 106-43 BCE
- Plutarch - c.40-120s CE
- [Hegesippus](#) - 110-180 CE
- Athenaeus of Naucratis (Deipnosophistae) - c.170s-210s CE

The Hegesippus quote appears to be:

Quote

And Hegesippus, in his Philetairi, says—

That wisest Epicurus, when a man
Once ask'd him what was the most perfect good
Which men should constantly be seeking for,
Said pleasure is that good. Wisest and best
Of mortal men, full truly didst thou speak:
For there is nothing better than a dinner,
And every good consists in every pleasure.

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The "For there is nothing better than a dinner," is τοῦ γὰρ μασᾶσθαι κρεῖττον οὐκ ἔστ' οὐδὲ ἐν ἀγαθόν: where the translation "dinner" corresponds to μασᾶσθαι which has the connotation "knead, press into a mould, esp. of barley-cakes which were subsequently moistened and eaten without baking." There's our barley-cakes again.

I will grant you every which way that we're dealing with hostile witnesses (and one's going for humor in the case of Atheneaus), but if they say they're actually quoting something we're almost obligated to believe they're at least quoting or paraphrasing something.

When Athenaeus writes that: *And Epicurus says—"The origin and root of all good is the pleasure of the stomach; and all excessive efforts of wisdom have reference to the stomach."* 'ἀρχὴ καὶ ῥίζα παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ ἢ τῆς γαστρὸς ἡδονή; καὶ τὰ σοφὰ <καὶ> τὰ περισσὰ ἐπὶ ταύτην ἔχει τὴν ἀναφοράν.' That sounds like Epicurus, especially with his use of ἀρχὴ καὶ ῥίζα echoing pleasure being the ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος. The pleasure of the stomach (ἢ τῆς γαστρὸς ἡδονή) is being called the ἀρχὴ καὶ ῥίζα "foundation/origin and root" just as pleasure writ large is the foundation/origin and end-goal.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

the physical pleasures of the stomach outweigh all others

I don't see Epicurus (siphoned through those later authors) saying that. It seems to me he's saying "You can rely on your stomach. Listen to your stomach. When you're hungry eat, not to excess but to relieve your REAL feelings of hunger." and so on like Bryan and Eikadistes wrote. Satisfying your stomach/hunger is listening to nature. I could also see this taken metaphorically. If your stomach is upset, if you're nervous and you have butterflies, listen to your stomach. This is the same idea as the mind per Diogenes Laertius being located in the thorax/chest (not necessary "the heart" like some write): the rational part resides in the chest (τὸ δὲ λογικὸν ἐν τῷ θώρακι): θώρακι = [θώραξ = the abdominal cavity, chest, thorax](#); "κεφαλῆς καὶ θώρακος καὶ τῆς κάτω κοιλίας" taken as extending below the midriff.