

An Error-Filled Video from the Neo-Epicureans: Office Space

Post by “Elayne” of September 19, 2019 at 4:44 PM

A member of our group alerted us to this video, which makes a number of serious errors. I am posting it for the purposes of illustrating the differences between Epicurean Philosophy and some inaccurate modern popularizations.

First, as we've discussed several times in this group, ataraxia and aponia (absence of anxiety and absence of pain) are certainly integral to the feeling of pleasure-- however, these are not words to _substitute_ for pleasure, and they don't indicate some unusual or special kind of pleasure.

Think of it this way-- to put a chair in my living room, I must have an absence of empty floor space where the chair is. But I don't say "I put an absence of empty floor space in my living room"! That tells you nothing at all about what is there instead of empty space. I say "I have a chair", and then you will know what I mean.

In the same way, reduction of pain and anxiety is important to make room for pleasure, but a removal process doesn't describe pleasure.

That is why Epicurus used the word for pleasure-- because everyone knew what he meant. It wasn't an esoteric term, and it didn't mean some kind of rarified monk-like state.

Second, it is kind of hilarious how the video makers have misunderstood the movie Office Space. The scenes they show as representing Epicurean action are intended by the screenwriters as part of the long series of errors made by the lead character, Peter, and his friends. Action scenes, such as kicking a faulty piece of equipment, are presented by the video makers as representing static mental pleasure-- a bizarre decision.

Getting stuck in a miserable Dilbert cubicle is clearly not pleasurable, but the initial efforts to get out include theft (which Epicurus advised against due to the consequences of pain) and other heedless moves. It isn't until Peter realizes he has caused danger to his friends, the pain of which is not worth the potential gain, that the plot turns.

Instead of glorifying slacker culture, the movie takes it apart. We learn that Peter has already been doing nothing for most of his day, staring into space pretending to be busy. When he finally decides to get a job he enjoys, he is much more active than before, and he is engaged and smiling. He's enjoying working beside his neighbor. Overlooking the cliches about blue vs white collar work (one can be intellectually active too), it is clear Peter has decided to use his freedom to arrange his life for pleasure-- while his software engineer friends, in contrast,

remain stuck.

Who represents the outcome of doing nothing? The arsonist, who gets the money and uses it to sit under an umbrella on the beach, still complaining constantly.

I would not call Peter an Epicurean model, although his final move was in that direction.

Beware of this type of misleading presentation of our philosophy. You will miss out on your possibility for a life of pleasure if you follow this neo-Epicurean path of aiming towards minimalism, doing nothing, and blandness. Instead, understand that your choices have consequences of pain or pleasure, and make those choices wisely. Aim for pleasure! What will you do today to move towards your own pleasure?

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