

# Psychology Today Article: "Frederick the Happy: The Old Fritz was an Epicurean."

Post by "Hiram" of August 25, 2019 at 11:11 AM

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/one-am...erick-the-happy>

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Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2019 at 11:20 AM

Great catch, Hiram - thank you.

Lots of good information in that article, but here is where I think he goes wrong, as I think Thomas Jefferson and Cassius Longinus, and in my view Epicurus himself would agree (with me):

Here's where I stake my claim that Frederick was fundamentally an Epicurean. He may not have been a pure Epicurean, for if he had been, he would have resigned as king and returned to Rheinsberg Castle, where he had enjoyed the carefree years of early adulthood before he was called upon to succeed his father.

I moved this thread into the Frederick the Great subforum. I see the article actually labels him an Epicurean. I might at some point move Frederick into the "Epicurean" forum category, but before I did that I would want to see evidence that Frederick ever referred to himself explicitly as an Epicurean.

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Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2019 at 11:26 AM

[Martin](#) - Have we found the 200 line poem on pleasure that is referenced here? Do you have a link we can post here?

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1129-psychology-today-article-frederick-the-happy-the-old-fritz-was-an-epicurean/>

Frederick left no doubt about his Epicureanism. In 1749, at the age of 37, he published a 200-line poem called *On Pleasure*. Blanning (p. 156) reports that in it, Frederick “begins with a dismissal of the intense but short-lived and dangerous carnal delights offered by prostitutes” (much like Epicurus did) but that he seeks to “combine a hundred different pleasures to create just one.”

“He declared that he would,” reports Blanning, “always follow the Epicurean gospel.” Epicurus’s term for this one pleasure is *ataraxia*, a pleasant, untroubled state of mind. An Epicurean is not obliged to maintain this state at all times but is encouraged to follow its guiding light. Frederick did, and this may be, in no small measure, what made him great.

#### **Ataraxia, Stirratonaxia**

The poem ‘On Pleasure’ referred to by Blanning appears to not have been Frederick’s only effort in that direction. Hadley (2011) reports that a 1740 poem from the King’s pen was ‘recently discovered’ in a Berlin archive. Its title, *La Jouissance*, might be translated as pleasure, joy, or orgasm, and its lyrics leave no doubt that the latter loomed large: “Trembling with excitement,” Frederick recalls his friend’s Algarotti’s “vigorous desire in full measure.” Lust overcomes prudential ethics. Using a translation by Giles MacDonogh, Hadley delivers Frederick’s conclusion that

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## Post by “Hiram” of August 25, 2019 at 2:04 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

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This is the most unequivocal quote

### Quote

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## Post by “Cassius” of August 25, 2019 at 3:04 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1129-psychology-today-article-frederick-the-happy-the-old-fritz-was-an-epicurean/>

That does sound firm. I hope we can locate the poem and confirm it! Working now....

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### **Post by "Joshua" of August 25, 2019 at 7:53 PM**

I'm somewhat disappointed there's no audiobook for Blanning's biography, I was hoping to have a listen!

Frederick the Great figured prominently in some of the European History courses I took, but I had no idea of this side of him.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 25, 2019 at 9:06 PM**



After our initial discussions of Frederick the Great six on Archive.org to see what I could find, and I came across this 1935 German movie (English subtitles) "The Old King and the Young King" which tells the story of Frederick's early life up until the time he became king. Wow what an upbringing he had. If this movie is correct, his father had Frederick's "best friend" executed for trying to help him escape to France. I don't recall that there is a lot of philosophy discussed in the movie, but it has a lot of detail about some of Frederick's formative

experiences in Prussia.

I would dearly love to get the text of that poem and look further into all of this.

<https://archive.org/details/DerAlteUndDerJungeKoenig1935>

I am particularly interested to find out whether Fritz had any interest in physics and epistemology. Not every lover of "pleasure" is an Epicurean, by far, but it definitely seems that Fritz combined a respect for pleasure with an antipathy toward religion, or at least some versions of Christianity. I can't recall the names of the other movies I found, but it appears that

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there were several about the life of Frederick, and throughout them they had Frederick making antagonizing references toward religion. He might at least deserve the title Cyreniac, but I'd like to get more triangulation on him saying something about Epicurus before I get too enthusiastic. 😊

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### **Post by “Martin” of August 26, 2019 at 11:30 AM**

"his father had Frederick's "best friend" executed for trying to help him escape" actually happened. They both deserted together, and the friend got sentenced in compliance with the penal code to death by a court (not the King) and executed but Frederick was not because the judges declared themselves unfit to judge over the crown prince. So, his father forced him to watch the execution of his friend as a penalty. The father was such a dick that one historian who started to write his biography gave up in disgust.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 26, 2019 at 11:37 AM**

Frederick's father was portrayed very nastily in that movie, Martin, at least in the way that he treated his son. If you have seen it or ever get a chance to I would be very interested in your commentary.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 26, 2019 at 11:42 AM**

I see Frederick's poem can be found in part here: <https://www.historytoday.com/frederick-greats-erotic-poem> and perhaps in full (in German) here: <https://www.zeit.de/2011/38/Schossgebet>

If this is indeed a basically a very direct poem / love letter targeted at a particular lover, that would also lead me away from, rather than toward, considering Frederick a full and complete Epicurean philosopher.

***Argh! I just noticed that the lines in this version rhyme, which indicates to me that the writer has not translated it literally, and that causes me to wonder whether this***

***is accurate to the meaning:***

Quote

**From Königsberg to Monsieur Algarotti, Swan of Padua**

This night, vigorous desire in full measure,

Algarotti wallowed in a sea of pleasure.

A body not even a Praxitiles fashions

Redoubled his senses and imbued his passions

Everything that speaks to eyes and touches hearts,

Was found in the fond object that enflamed his parts.

Transported by love and trembling with excitement

In Cloris' arms he yields himself to contentment

The love that unites them heated their embraces

And tied bodies and arms as tightly as laces.

Divine sensual pleasure! To the world a king!

Mother of their delights, an unstaunchable spring,

Speak through my verses, lend me your voice and tenses

Tell of their fire, acts, the ecstasy of their senses!

Our fortunate lovers, transported high above

Know only themselves in the fury of love:

Kissing, enjoying, feeling, sighing and dying

Reviving, kissing, then back to pleasure flying.

And in Knidos' grove, breathless and worn out

Was these lovers' happy destiny, without doubt.

But all joy is finite; in the morning ends the bout.

Fortunate the man whose mind was never the prey

To luxury, or grand airs, one who knows how to say

A moment of climax for a fortunate lover

Is worth so many aeons of star-spangled honour.

Display More

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**Post by "Martin" of August 26, 2019 at 11:50 AM**

I checked the 41 poems from Frederick which are published at

<https://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/gedichte-5321>

but none of them matches the description. Some of them do touch on Epicurean topics.

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1129-psychology-today-article-frederick-the-happy-the-old-fritz-was-an-epicurean/>

## **Post by “Martin” of August 26, 2019 at 12:03 PM**

La Jouissance does not match the description by Blanning. The assigned year is different, too.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of August 26, 2019 at 12:15 PM**

From the third Rheinsberg (October 30, 1737)

(all my pastes here will be google translate):

O you who are my only deity,  
you God of joy, reward my faithfulness!  
Give me what is the summit of all pleasures,  
O give, that in the midst of enjoyment  
a blessed forgetfulness and rapture  
delight me to ever new desires!

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## **Post by “Cassius” of August 26, 2019 at 12:22 PM**

An explicit reference to Epicurus!

<https://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/gedichte-5321/9>

## **The Man Caesarions**

**(August 1745)**

What do I hear? God, what a terrible word:

Caesarion is no more! Caesarion is gone!

You have lost the most faithful, best friend!

As if daggers pierce me a thousand times,

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my heart twitches

in savage pain.

You are not anymore! that's how it will sound to me forever;

Your love will come to you after nothing.

As I honored you in life, honored,

so you are worth my heartfelt love.

How firmly did you look into the eye of death,

before which every man's heart dreads!

Supported by manly courage, guided,

your pure soul remained untouched

From that illusion of a hell

And a dark future of our soul.

In your happy hours of life you have

**found the support of Master Epicurus;**

How proud you have risen in death:

Since you outbid Zenos mental power!

Alas, this heart which struck so sublime,

What became of him? Who tells me? Who?

The Spirit

Who Carried Noble Thoughts, Is He Still Lived? Oh, is not he?

God, what a chasm! Everything is destroyed,

His spirit and His goodness! If he lived,

certainly, his shadow, his thought sought

night and death to me, yes, he hovered around

my woeful head: he would have set me up!

Sorrowfully remember, bitter chalice of sorrow!  
And imagine, stupid Stoa,  
you could be human souls in the long run  
against the blows of fate?  
How grief-stricken I think,  
How strong - how unwavering -  
And now, what must I experience now?  
Defenseless, I am abandoned to the pain,  
Destroyed, almost annihilated in  
death by your death. -  
Still, quiet! What is the mind still worth,  
when it turns against feeling  
and increases my grief with bitterness?  
He tells me my everything is gone.  
So far the world, so empty! And I, I am  
orphaned, alone! I loved you so much -  
How shadowy did the days blow,  
because we, what pleases us, what saddens us,  
how brothers divided; because in the same stroke  
your heart and mine struck. My luck was yours.  
How were we in each and every one, on a  
large and a small scale; unclouded and clear,  
the friendship sky remained forever.  
The cheerfulness has always accompanied you,  
your mind, well guided by beautiful books,

has like tamed, chivalrous and tender,  
the cheerfulness, which often barks wildly.  
It made you worthy of your noble custom  
to join the illustrious spirits.  
Brilliantly illuminating Hellas and Paris,  
Oh, and your heart: to place you among those  
whose friendship the songs announce to us, the  
little band of high-minded heroes, honored  
for their faithfulness.  
If I knew how to strike the lyre of Horace,  
Truly, the echo of the Parnassus should  
lament to me this heart's longing  
which remains with you without ceasing;  
More than Achates you were, I would say,  
More than a Pylades, Pirithous;  
So in love fieriest outpouring  
Singing should be immortal,  
What adorns you throughout your life.  
I can see the sun and you no longer!  
So it is true, only too true, that he,  
the inexorable, without difference, pulls the  
most beautiful into nothingness.  
Whether value, whether worthless! Honor or shame!  
Who asks after that on the Cocytusstrande:  
What has Achilles, what Hector Thersites

advance? I, too, are walking at a rapid pace toward  
the home, the dark; Days, hours  
are how they came, escaped me in flight.  
Half way through is the life path,  
and close and closer to the target approaches.  
Patience! Not much longer lasts, so I greet you  
in the dark shadow kingdom, to be heartfelt  
With you in gloomy peace-freedom There  
the friendship to erneun  
And on and on  
you to be close to loving.  
But as long as  
fate holds me captive in this world ,  
your image will never be forgotten.  
So long there's no luck, which ever  
relieves Me my burning pain.  
Let  
my head lower me under your grave-cypresses ; unmeasured  
Let my painful desires be!  
There I want hot tears of heart  
And sigh of you from never  
longed sinews And deep-felted songs christmas,  
With myrtles then and flowers - look, it still shine  
my tears on it - Your grave wreath.  
And yet, I blissfully

expose him , The serene forehead with the nobility of the soul

Death may face death,

A knight without fear and reproach.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 26, 2019 at 12:36 PM**

[In 14 reference to Lucretius:](#)

In the knowledge of barriers Bresche hit on the experience:  
Lucretius and Locke brought us deep revelation:  
They succeeded to cover the road to the goal.  
Come, let them follow us, in the paths that have been paved, to show  
man his own nature,  
and finite destiny: let him see how he became,  
and grew and matured in us, the spirit, where his whereabouts,  
when once fell into dust this earthly body ,  
With us he is born, strengthened, unfolds  
with our sensory life and transforms himself,  
just as that transforms: tender in childhood,  
just like our body, now fiery, cheeky kind,  
Daredevil as long as adolescence lifts us;  
Zag, flaccid in suffering, and again strongly enlivened,  
As soon as it is at ease: plagues him frailty,  
When he is reduced, falls into feebleness,  
And so he goes with us. Thus  
his fate always remains inseparable from our corporeality.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of August 26, 2019 at 12:49 PM**

This is really good stuff, guys! Thank you.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 26, 2019 at 12:59 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1129-psychology-today-article-frederick-the-happy-the-old-fritz-was-an-epicurean/>

My computer crashed when I was on 15 so I will have to come back to 15-41 later, but there are definite echos of Epicurean themes on no life after death and questioning of supernatural gods.