

Does Baloo Speak for Epicurus In the Song "Bare Necessities" from "The Jungle Book" Movie?

Post by "Cassius" of February 18, 2020 at 8:42 AM

I brought up this analogy in another recent thread and I think it would be fruitful to talk about this. However I haven't watched this full movie since I was a child, and all I really remember is the song "Bare Necessities," which fully captures the attitude praising "minimalism" which is so widespread. As explained elsewhere I don't think this accurately expresses Epicurus' advice, which appears to me to be that wealth and poverty are contextual and relative, and that the goal instead should not be a particular amount of wealth, but the maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain. The best summary of that point seems to me to be VS 63: *"Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess."*

However i think we can gain a lot more from "the Jungle Book" than just making this bare observation. If the synopsis below is correct, even within the movie the point is made that simply looking in the short term for "bare necessities" is not going to be the right decision for Mowgli. In looking into the details, it looks like we can draw all sorts of other observations that put the words of the catchy main tune into perspective. It will always be possible to make the same correct observations that "natural and necessary" needs should have priority (safety, sexual attraction, friendship) but by pointing out the details of the circumstances I think we can see why a "bare necessities" philosophy of life is ultimately destructive and not what Epicurus recommended.

I know some of you guys are a lot more familiar with movies and artwork than am I. What are your thoughts about "The Jungle Book" movie in general, and the song "Bare Necessities" in particular. Note: Some of you probably have read the Kipling original, and I see that the wikipedia article indicates that the original is much more dark than the movie. Probably we should focus on the movie, but if anyone sees useful deductions from contrasting the movie to the original then that is fine too.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJizAYb7OAK>

[Full lyrics are here.](#) [Here is the plot synopsis from Wikipedia.](#)

[Mowgli](#), a young [orphan](#) boy, is found in a basket in the deep jungles of [India](#) by [Bagheera](#), a [black panther](#) who promptly takes him to Raksha, a mother [wolf](#) who has just had cubs. She and her mate, Rama, raise him along with their own cubs and after ten years, Mowgli becomes well acquainted with jungle life and plays with his wolf siblings. Bagheera is pleased with how happy Mowgli is now, but also worries that Mowgli must eventually return to his own kind.

One night, the wolf pack parents meet at Council Rock, having learned that [Shere Khan](#), a man-eating [Bengal tiger](#), has returned to the pack's part of the jungle. Pack leader Akela decides that Mowgli must leave the jungle for his own safety. Bagheera volunteers to escort him to a "Man-Village." They leave that very night, but Mowgli is determined to stay in the jungle. He and Bagheera rest in a tree for the night, where [Kaa](#), a hungry [Indian python](#), tries to devour Mowgli, but Bagheera intervenes. The next morning, Mowgli tries to join the [elephant](#) patrol, led by [Colonel Hathi](#) and his wife Winifred. Bagheera finds Mowgli, but after a fight, decides to leave Mowgli on his own. Mowgli soon meets up with the laid-back, fun-loving [sloth bear Baloo](#), who promises to raise Mowgli himself and never take him to the Man-Village.

Shortly afterward, a group of [monkeys](#) kidnap Mowgli and take him to their leader, [King Louie](#) the [orangutan](#). King Louie offers to help Mowgli stay in the jungle if he will tell Louie how to make fire, like other humans. However, since he was not raised by humans, Mowgli does not know how to make fire. Bagheera and Baloo arrive to rescue Mowgli and in the ensuing chaos, King Louie's palace is demolished to rubble. Bagheera speaks to Baloo that night and convinces him that the jungle will never be safe for Mowgli with Shere Khan around. In the morning, Baloo reluctantly explains to Mowgli that the Man-Village is best for him, but Mowgli accuses him of breaking his promise and runs away. As Baloo sets off in search of Mowgli, Bagheera rallies the help of Hathi and his patrol. However, Shere Khan himself, who was eavesdropping on Bagheera and Hathi's conversation, is now determined to hunt and kill Mowgli himself.

Meanwhile, Mowgli encounters Kaa once again, who again attempts to eat him, but he escapes thanks to the unwitting intervention of the suspicious Shere Khan. As a storm gathers, a depressed Mowgli encounters a group of friendly [vultures](#) who accept Mowgli as a fellow outcast. Shere Khan appears shortly after, scaring off the vultures and confronting Mowgli. Baloo rushes to the rescue and tries to keep Shere Khan away from Mowgli, but is nearly killed. When lightning strikes a nearby tree and sets it ablaze, the vultures swoop in to distract Shere Khan, while Mowgli grabs a large flaming branch and ties it to the tiger's tail. Shere Khan, who is [terrified of fire](#), panics and runs away.

Bagheera and Baloo take Mowgli to the edge of the Man-Village, but Mowgli is still hesitant to go there. However, his mind abruptly changes when he is smitten by a beautiful young girl from the village who is coming down by the riverside to fetch water. After noticing Mowgli, she "accidentally" drops her water pot. Mowgli retrieves it for her and follows her into the Man-Village. After Mowgli [shrugs](#) to Baloo and Bagheera, to show that he has made up his mind and chosen to go to the Man-Village, Baloo and Bagheera decide to head home, content that Mowgli is safe and happy with his own kind.

Post by "Elayne" of February 18, 2020 at 9:35 AM

Of course, the joke in that song is that while singing it, Baloo, a bear, is demonstrating "bear necessities" to Mowgli. It's obvious Baloo is completely missing that Mowgli can't make use of bear necessities, because he is human-- Mowgli fumbles when trying to copy Baloo. Bagheera is watching them and gets what is going on.

Baloo's necessities, despite being presented with the play on "bare", are as luxurious as a bear could imagine, which is also part of the joke-- that he's going on about simple, etc, while he is eating delicious food and playing. Who wouldn't want to eat pawpaws and swim in a beautiful river? It's like a person on an expensive tropical vacation bragging about their simple life. We are supposed to get that this bear is not living a restricted life. He has a pleasurable life. Pleasure itself is shown as the bear necessity.

If you take it beyond the species-specific message, you could say that the individuals have their own pleasures-- just as a bear pleasure necessity is not a human pleasure necessity, one person's pleasure is not always another's. Bagheera knows that, and that pain is the result of not getting the message. Mowgli lets pleasure guide him at the end, not just his species pleasure but his own.

Post by "Cassius" of February 18, 2020 at 11:12 AM

Yes those are excellent points -- there are multiple levels of things going on here!

Post by "Cassius" of February 18, 2020 at 1:56 PM

Here is an example of how the "bare necessities" analysis has intruded into internet commentary on Epicurus until it has become accepted as obvious truth:

A further problem with the pursuit of mobile pleasure is that we are bound to continuously seek higher forms of pleasure, no longer being satisfied with what previously occupied us. One can easily envision someone who seeks enjoyable drinks becoming eventually dissatisfied with having beer at meals and desire expensive scotch. While this does not present an inherent problem, the more extravagant the pleasure, the more likely one will eventually have it frustrated. Therefore, Epicurus advocates that one adjust his desires so that he desires only the bare necessities, like bread and salt, which have little chance of being of frustrated.

That is from: [Epicurus: The Happy Apikores](#) - A page entitled "Daf Aleph - Jewish Thought For Thoughtful Jews"

Post by “Godfrey” of February 18, 2020 at 2:08 PM

To your point, the underline sounds Stoic, not Epicurean.

Btw I've had this song stuck in my head all morning. Decidedly not necessary!

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2020 at 2:18 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Btw I've had this song stuck in my head all morning. Decidedly not necessary!

Probably this is one of the first movies that I went to as a child in the theatre. This song has been burned in my head for some 40+ years! it's this kind of catchy tune and phrasing that can have significant cultural impact, even if it is a cartoon bear eating ants and bananas. 😊