

On Unhealthy Social Media Use / If Epicurus Were Alive Today, Would He Use A Smartphone?

Post by “Matt” of January 13, 2021 at 11:40 AM

On the subject of healthy social media usage and interaction for Epicureans living in modern times.

How should an Epicurean living in modern times “behave” while interacting with these new technological advances and media platforms? And how should we react to the unhealthy behavior of others?

We see (in the US) that there is a “political” situation going on, but my personal contention is that it is NOT entirely “a black and white” political issue, but rather an unprecedented mental health issue that is on a grand scale. Not only in the US, but worldwide. It could be theorized that much of the turbulence is due to the unhealthy usage of social media for the last 20 years or so. As it has evolved without much regulation to keep things from getting out of control from those who created the platforms.

We see so many people so fixated on certain narratives, many of which are unsubstantiated, that we must wonder had they not been addicted to the social media feedback loops and echo chambers, would they be seizing their own pleasure now? Doing pleasurable activities of their choosing?

As opposed to miserably spending an inordinate amount of time getting worked up over other people’s agendas, conspiracies, fiery rhetoric etc. reposting and promulgating false claims and hoaxes. Feeding a monstrous machine of confusion.

Many of us having family and friends who are now smack in the middle of this behavior, may now believe it is time to seriously address the issue at hand: Unhealthy social media usage.

Perhaps a bit of serious parrhesia for the overall health of our society at large? Because we are all feeling the effects of other people’s obsessions now and it’s causing disruption to our happiness not only online...but offline.

Post by “Cassius” of January 13, 2021 at 12:01 PM

Notes from similar thread on Facebook:

Poster: If Epicurus lived in our time, would he have used a smartphone?

Elayne:: [] Love it! Of course, he would do the same process as for every choice or avoidance-- consider the total effect on his pleasure and pain, in his own life, knowing his own preferences and situation. He would not make a decision apart from these specifics because pleasure is what must come first.


Matt:

As I posted elsewhere...

In my humble opinion, Epicurus most likely would've written a treatise on the use of an iPhone/Internet/Media/Social Media. To show the advantages of how the technology leads to a more pleasurable life.....and conversely if not used WISELY how it can become the greatest tool of creating pain and misery.

Elli:

ES. 41 We must laugh and philosophize at the same time and do our household duties and employ our other faculties, and never cease proclaiming the sayings of the true philosophy.

If Epicurus lived today, definitely he would use iphone, to watch and such kind of videos on youtube for laughing out loud.  image not found or type unknown

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUm2KWPmnHg>

Eis Aiona : may be smartphone, but FOR SURE NO SOCIAL MEDIA

Post by “Godfrey” of January 13, 2021 at 4:11 PM

To the extent that this forum is social media, Epicurus would definitely use a smartphone/tablet/computer. 😊

Post by “Matt” of January 13, 2021 at 4:13 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1832-on-unhealthy-social-media-use-if-epicurus-were-alive-today-would-he-use-a-smartp/>

Of course this forum is probably the most healthy form of social media going. A philosophical forum among friends discussing pleasure.

This is the right way.☐☐

Post by “Matt” of January 15, 2021 at 3:55 PM

So I pulled this from an article:

“Apophenia: the tendency to perceive a connection or meaningful pattern between unrelated or random things (such as objects or ideas).”

I see this as *one* of the cruxes of how conspiracy theories and “malinformation” are spreading today online and on social media. I see this from an Epicurean perspective as a failure to analyze data properly.

We can see that many people have unfounded opinions about a whole host of things, based on anecdotal claims from extremely unreliable sources. The “information” is created at random and then disseminated to the social media users (often with very little restriction). The users then absorb the information and then they disseminate it to even more users, so that the information spreads exponentially.

On a personal note...I’ve heard some “humdingers” lately. Really unbelievable claims, from people I considered to be of somewhat sound mind. I believe multiple factors are involved to include social isolation...but it appears this “acceptance” of false narratives seems to be evolving.

Post by “Cassius” of January 15, 2021 at 6:06 PM

[Quote from Matt](#)

“Apophenia: the tendency to perceive a connection or meaningful pattern between unrelated or random things (such as objects or ideas).”

I agree with everything you wrote but I am unsure about this word and/or the suggested definition. The ability to see connections is a good thing; I guess the issue that seems to me to be harder is how to decide whether the connections are "really" there or not.

Other than for that definition, the rest of what you've said there seems probably something more like normal "gullibility" or "willingness to believe on faith without evidence" or "naivete" or similar words.

Post by “Matt” of January 15, 2021 at 6:16 PM

I think the context in this case is that it has to do with people perceiving that there are connections when there aren't any actual "objective" connections at all.

Random events pointing to large scale conspiracies that ultimately do not exist.

For example (this is a REAL example)... actual seismic activity + military activity in certain areas +power outages = Secret underground enemy base being destroyed by a military weapon...in Northern Maine USA. This was a claim that people were accepting.

In most normal cases apophenia would be a good thing. But I suppose if the connections are not actually there and they continue to be perceived incorrectly over and over again, that means the data is bad.

Post by “Elayne” of January 15, 2021 at 6:23 PM

[Cassius](#) apophenia was correctly described by [Matt](#) -- it's not gullibility. It's like seeing a face in a piece of toast and having the sensation it means something. I say sensation because it's not a rational process-- it's much faster than that. It's our pattern recognition function. In diseases like schizophrenia, apophenia can be extreme-- the whole environment full of apparent signs and portents. But it happens to typical people also. If I saw the same article Matt saw, which I won't post bc political, a game designer described how a group was convinced some irrelevant wood shavings on the floor of a basement were in the shape of an arrow, so they tore into a wall expecting to find more clues. Great article!

It's relevant to us here because pattern recognition is tricky for us. We all see more patterns than are present-- more cause-effect event connections. We blame the fast food place for a

virus bc we ate there, etc.

Smartphones and social media can amplify pattern errors. I'm sure Epicurus would have something to say!

That article also discussed epiphany, the "aha" moment, as addictive. I can see that ☐☐. Maybe it would be a pleasure to be cautious with.

Post by “Matt” of January 15, 2021 at 6:38 PM

[Elayne](#) yes that was a good article. Glad you saw it!

What’s interesting though is what happens when the things a person falsely suspects to be true are proven false? Many times, based on my tried an true observations of people I know, they simply “move on” without concern. Or they will backpedal and try to distance themselves from what they claimed. But the behavior doesn’t change...just on to the next “theory.”

Post by “Matt” of January 15, 2021 at 6:53 PM

No matter what, this acceptance of terribly spurious data and false claims are clearly contributing to the deterioration of critical thinking in the general population.

Now whole “mythologies” have been created based on random (untrue) information, simply because these claims are posted and reposted a hundred thousand times in “bubbled off” echo chambers where confirmation bias has blossomed into radical behavior...on a grand scale in society.

Post by “Charles” of January 15, 2021 at 8:08 PM

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This.

I've been inactively following and observing the developments of certain (I won't say) political conspiracy theories for the past year to see how they are developed and propagated, due to their increasingly public presence. One in particular that's been increasingly erratic since November is particularly dangerous for its rather innovative means of reinforcing the spurious, dubious, and outright false claims and predictions.

If I were to connect it to our knowledge and philosophy, then this particular conspiracy and its respective crowd are conjuring up claims and numerous falsities that are catered to their desires. They aren't being told what's what by an authority figure, something characteristic of typical cults, they are told to pursue the (false) truth on their own accord and their fellowship in their many echo chambers on FB, Twitter, 8ch, etc. further reinforce these ideas.

Further more, those who abash the theories, according to these people, must be in tow with the shadowy "they". Leading to a confrontation and presentation of the truth and other facts being easily dismissed.

Social media is of course at fault for this, but only in the sense of how information can be expedited and accessed at such a pace unlike anything before it. Anonymity is a factor as well for providing the safety of identity to engage in these unhealthy habits.

Post by “Elayne” of January 15, 2021 at 8:12 PM

So, definitely this aspect is not conducive to pleasure! Both in terms of anxiety and making decisions based on inaccurate conclusions. I'm sure Epicurus would have comments ☐

Post by “Charles” of January 15, 2021 at 8:35 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1832-on-unhealthy-social-media-use-if-epicurus-were-alive-today-would-he-use-a-smartp/>

[Quote from Elayne](#)

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"But when one accepts one theory and rejects another, which harmonizes as well with the phenomenon, it is obvious that he altogether leaves the path of scientific inquiry and has recourse to myth." - LtP

"If you reject any single sensation, and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion, as to the appearance awaiting confirmation, and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations, as well, with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong." - PD 24

"If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles." - PD 25

Post by “Cassius” of January 16, 2021 at 5:59 AM

I suspect good analogies could be drawn between how disinformation spreads today with they way a particular kind -Christianity- spread in the Roman Empire.

Post by “Joshua” of January 16, 2021 at 9:24 AM

Quote

I suspect good analogies could be drawn between how disinformation spreads today with they way a particular kind -Christianity- spread in the Roman Empire.

"Our problem is this: our prefrontal lobes are too small, and our adrenal glands are too big, and we're afraid of the dark and afraid to die, and we believe in the truths of holy books that are so

stupid that a child can—and all children do, as you can tell by their questions—actually see right through them." -Christopher Hitchens

Post by “Marabrant” of February 18, 2022 at 3:52 PM

Hi! It seems to me that the topic is not quite correctly presented. After all, the problem of society is not in social networks. The problem of society is how social networks are used. Social networks themselves are neither good nor evil. It's just a tool that people use for various purposes. But you need to use critical thinking and evaluate and analyze information yourself.

Post by “SimonC” of February 18, 2022 at 4:47 PM

Hi! Perhaps we should be clear what we are talking about.

As was mentioned upthread, this forum can be considered a form of social media. It seems to be ok.

It is possible to imagine many other forms of social media that would be empowering people and helping them to make meaningful connections.

But I think what we are talking about here is the current state of major social networks, in particular facebook but also twitter and others. The catastrophic (CATASTROPHIC) effects these have are in the end due to business incentives. The networks want to have maximum engagement from their users and the best way to do this is to create bubbled-off echo chambers that distorts peoples view of reality, while keeping them anxious and outraged at cartoon caricatures of "the other side". This *is* a problem in the social networks themselves! There is a huge power imbalance between the networks and their users. For this reason I think it is wrong to solely blame the bad content on facebook on its users.

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2022 at 7:47 PM

Welcome Marabrant (whose post above is I think their first). I usually get around to posting a "Welcome" thread more quickly, but I was unusually tied up today. Again Welcome and I hope

you will let us know a little about your background in Epicurus. [Welcome Marabrant!](#)

Post by “Matt” of February 21, 2022 at 2:25 PM

I obviously very much disagree that this subject is being presented “incorrectly” since there is ample evidence in the medical community that there is a wide scale issue and to simply ignore that fact would be adding to the problem. Whether it comes down to the companies that are the facilitators or users who don’t know how to manage their online time in a healthy way, there is an obvious issue.

Post by “Matt” of February 21, 2022 at 2:41 PM

Ironically, the idea that social media profited a person monetarily is actually one of the issues. On the lowest level, selling handmade clothing on Etsy is probably the most benign thing that social media could be used for...and in a vacuum that in itself isn’t a bad thing at all. But on a much larger scale, the person who works at Facebook in their R & D department that contracts out to people who specialize in psychological manipulation for keeping people addicted to things (such as online gambling etc.) as a means to keep people (and kids) engaged on their platform...even if it means that society becomes more dangerous and unhealthy because of it, it doesn’t matter to them because the company makes a profit, the dollar is the bottom line. It’s ultimately the same principle. But on a macro level, the developers who create these platforms and allow extremely addictive and hostile content to proliferate across them are a huge aspect of this problem.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of February 21, 2022 at 3:14 PM

Yes, i agree. Especially the manipulation part is, in my opinion, disgusting. I’m in very high opinion of psychology, as it can create great good- but also great evil. It’s a tool we’ve to be very, very careful with. And probably the same applies to social media.

Post by “Sam_Qwerty” of July 24, 2025 at 8:19 PM

If Epicurus wanted to start a world philosophical movement the way he did in the past, he would be forced to either use social media himself, or hire someone else to run his social media accounts for him to spread his ideas. I am not sure what Epicurus would write on the topic, but it seems to me to be consistent with his philosophy that if social media use is preventing one from enjoying simple pleasures, or even luxurious pleasures. If cell phone use is preventing one from fully experiencing these pleasures, than I expect Epicurus would see it as problematic.

Epicurus seems to have been very interested in the latest scientific speculation of his time, and he would use the Internet to help him learn about scientific research, and write scientific works. Social media tends to be very shallow, and someone who aims to have knowledge on a wide variety of subjects wouldn't waste too much time on it and would probably hire someone else to manage his accounts, perhaps personally writing messages from time to time. The Internet can get you started, but as an autodidact, I have found that old fashioned books are still the best way to find in-depth information from reputable sources that are not agenda driven.