

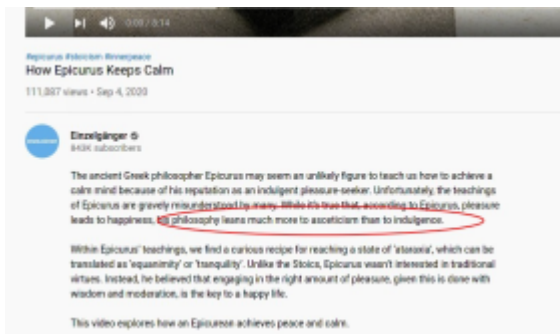
New Annual Event - The "Bread And Water Multimedia Award" - Nominations for 2021 Award (to be selected in December) Now Open!

Post by "Cassius" of April 26, 2021 at 3:35 PM

My blood pressure was already high today before I received this link from someone who was no doubt trying to be helpful.

I do not think it would be possible, if someone worked for 100 years, to state the "ascetic" position more clearly and more efficiently than is the video which is receiving the first nomination for the year.

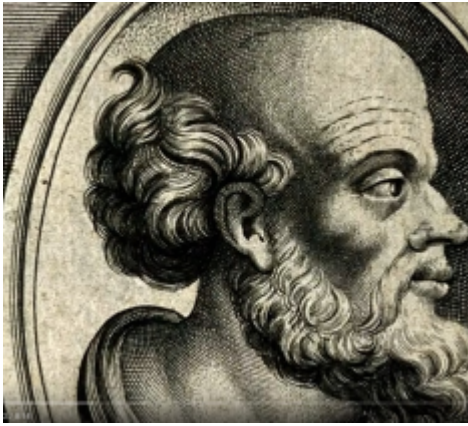
THIS was not an auspicious start:



Not ten seconds into the video strike too, a false picture of Epicurus:



Followed immediately by ANOTHER false picture of Epicurus:



Why? The producer apparently knows the correct image, as it is portrayed on the title image of the video.

But I digress. These are followed immediately by a classic eastern symbol of asceticism:



As to the rest, you know what is striking to me in this video? He is hitting repeatedly that Epicurus did not want us to pursue "vain" desires / pleasures because they have no natural limit. That's the exact argument that Plato uses against [Philebus](#) to prove that pleasure cannot be the goal. But according to this view, Epicurus held that it is ONLY the "natural" desires that have a limit, and are therefore worth pursuing. In other words, he is saying that Epicurus held that we should STRICTLY seek only bread and water, because hunger has a limit, but we should never pursue any pleasure of any kind that has no limit. In other words, he is saying it is valid to look at bread and water as a legitimate pleasure because it has a limit in the moment when we eat, but it is NOT valid to ever pursue any "unnecessary" desire because we'll want more of it. Can you imagine any more logical way to convince someone to shut up, sit down, and go live in a cave on bread and water? And to contend not only that it's the most logical way of life, but indeed the HIGHEST way of life?????? If this version were in fact correct, Epicurus would be in my estimation one of the most worthless and indeed evil philosophers in the history of the world.

It ought to be obvious (and would be if someone were aware of the [Philebus](#) argument) that the point of the limit is a LIFETIME limit, and not an "of the moment" limit. I dare say that "for the moment" anyone could be satisfied with greed or power or fame or any other of the clearly "unnecessary" pleasures, just like they can be satisfied with one hamburger "for the moment." But what about tomorrow, and the next day? More hamburgers! Same with water, or air, or bread!

OMG, people who wrote this video, don't you think Epicurus could see that too? The "satisfied for the moment" argument has no part in what Epicurus was teaching. The limit that is relevant and important is not "of the moment" but a "lifetime" limit, and the reason it is important is that it answers Plato's argument that pleasure has no limit, not that it drives us to a life of asceticism!

And of course he highlights MODERATION! how many times have you guys counted the word "moderation" appears in the Epicurean texts??? By my count, ZERO! Elli am I wrong about that?



And the oldest standby of them all for the pro-ascetic "Epicureans" - get rid of all UNNECESSARY desires:



I strongly doubt that any other video or other multimedia presentation can challenge this one as packing more nonsense into less than ten minutes. Of course I should be careful with the term "nonsense" - this is the accepted view of virtually the entire "Epicurean" academic community. Nevertheless, I deem it nonsense so this is nomination one.

The floor is now open for more nominations, or commentary on this first one.

Here it is in all its glory:

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

Post by "Cassius" of April 26, 2021 at 3:39 PM

Just so there's no confusion, this video proudly makes a direct reference to the ascetic ideal that gives the award its name: the "Bread and Water Multimedia Award"



Post by "Joshua" of April 26, 2021 at 7:42 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1978-new-annual-event-the-bread-and-water-multimedia-award-nominations-for-2021-award/>

Where is the "[Udders and Chian Wine](#)" multimedia award? I, for one, would like "to hear things far sweeter than the land of the Phaeacians"!

Post by "Cassius" of April 26, 2021 at 8:34 PM

That's a great name for an award too! I think we have the makings of an end-of-year banquet where we get together and have a ceremony for each of a full list of awards!

Unfortunately, while I can name countless contenders for the "Bread and Water" award, I cannot call to mind a single video on proper Epicurean philosophy which would merit a nomination for the "Udders and Chian Wine" award. I think that is a great goal for someone to undertake producing one in time for the 2021 Awards in December!

Post by "Don" of April 26, 2021 at 10:31 PM

I get the impression that the video uses the "incorrect portrait" of Epicurus from Raphael's The School of Athens at the beginning precisely because it portrays him as pudgy and indulgent, knowing full well that this is an incorrect view. They're talking there about the incorrect view of his philosophy, and so use that picture.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I think the video overemphasizes some things and misrepresents other things, but I'm not sure I completely disagree with the "in the moment" argument you're having such a visceral reaction to. The natural limit of hunger is when one is satiated. The natural limit of thirst is when you're hydrated. Indulging after those natural limits are reached will lead to pain: indigestion, nausea, etc.

On the other hand, there is no natural limit to "greed or power or fame." They are made-up concepts that have no natural limit. There is no level of satisfaction connected with those, therefore one can never find a natural limit. There is no such thing. That's why those desires are κενός "empty, vain, fruitless." By definition, they cannot be satisfied.

I fully agree that one's lifetime of pleasure needs to be taken into account, and that this involves making decisions to achieve living the most pleasurable life. However, there's something to also recognizing the natural limits in relation to pleasures in which you indulge. There is absolutely nothing wrong with eating caviar (if you like it!) and drinking champagne if the opportunity arises! Epicurus teaches this. But again if you overindulge - if you don't listen to your body and its natural limit - you're going to experience pain.

I admit I need to read [Philebus](#) but right now I'm not experiencing the degree of pain you're obviously experiencing from this video.

Post by "Cassius" of April 27, 2021 at 6:31 AM

Yes there are aspects of that video, such as the section on the gods, that are relatively well done. And my take on the tone of voice of the narrator is that he is being absolutely sincere in thinking that his presentation is accurate and fair.

But I think the best test of whether someone is getting so immersed in the "natural / necessary" "static / moving," "vain" and other such words that can no longer see the forest for all the trees is where they end up after the exercise.

And this video employs every one of the key words in the standard way, leading up to the conclusion at about the 20 second mark that "**His philosophy leads much more to asceticism than to indulgence.**"

Yes he's right to an extent - that conclusion is exactly what that interpretation does add up to.

Yet there is absolutely no record of any ancient Epicurean, including Epicurus himself, being an ascetic in practice.

If you think about those two simple facts: (1) one way to attribute a series of statements made by Epicurus leads inexorably to asceticism, but also consider (2) there is no evidence that Epicurus or any other ancient Epicurean was an ascetic in real life, something doesn't add up, and something is wrong in one of those two observations.

Either (1) Epicurus and his key followers were among the biggest and most successful hypocrites who ever walked the face of the earth, or (2) what Epicurus and his followers taught was understood in the ancient world by those who knew them as NOT in fact adding up to asceticism.

Further, not only is there no record of an ancient Epicurean blazing new trails or techniques in asceticism, but that the common criticism of Epicureans in the ancient world was that they were IN FACT living lives of indulgence and association with pleasures - activities that were distinctly NOT limited to "necessaries" such as bread and water. So far as I can tell, there is nothing about the Villa of the Papyri that indicates that it was intended to simulate living in a cave or on bread and water, and as we've discussed before, Epicurus' will with its significant list of material possessions - including slaves - does not indicate a tremendous amount of asceticism.

In the face of these contradictions it has always seemed to me that people would be looking to reconcile them, and if they were interested in gaining wisdom from Epicurus (rather than techniques for massive hypocrisy) they would look to reconcile them in a way that brings practice and theory into harmony. They would look for a way to understand the theory in a way that would explain their actual lifestyle.

But that's not what they do at all, and I think the answer why is clear: They are starting with the presumption, which is in fact not only the majority but also almost unanimous among all other philosophies, that "virtue" is the goal and living an "ascetic" life is worthy and desirable. For that reason they look for the interpretation of Epicurus that fits their preconceived notions of what he "should" have been teaching.

They don't care to reconcile the actual lifestyles with the theory, or explain why their result would have Epicurus seemingly invert the normal meaning of words, because what they care about is promoting their theory of asceticism and virtue as the best life, and that's really all that matters to them. And so much the better, even if it requires sacrificing their own credibility (ignoring clear facts and presenting a counterintuitive narrative results in the greatest philosopher of pleasure in world history being an ascetic?), when the result they achieve is the total neutering and suppression of the ideas of their greatest philosophical opponent.

Post by “Don” of April 27, 2021 at 8:03 AM

Quote from Dewitt

Another catchword of Epicurus is "fullness." It was part of his teaching that a limit to the desires had been set by Nature; thus a normal appetite could easily be satisfied to the full. The consequence was that fullness of pleasure was attainable. In the aggregate it meant that the fullness of all wholesome pleasures was feasible within the limits of mortal life.

It seems like we're talking about two different things here in relation to this ill-conceived video. I agree that the bread and water visuals and commentary are way overdone. But Epicurus did say that, if it was necessary, he could get pleasure from a simple meal of bread and water. I do not think that he meant he lived on that alone at all times. But he was saying his hunger could be satisfied and he could find pleasure in that meal. Would he attend a banquet and drink wine? Of course! If the opportunity presented itself! But I believe he would still listen to his body's natural limit and not eat to the point of pain. A life's "fullness of pleasure" is related to this but not the exact same thing. As in Dewitt's quote above, There's both the natural limit of appetites before pain sets in and, "in the aggregate" a pleasurable life could contain the limit of pleasures.

Post by "Cassius" of April 27, 2021 at 8:46 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

if it was necessary,

And I think that "IF" is the key. It's not necessary; Epicurus knows it's not necessary; we know it's not necessary; everyone knows it's not necessary -- so why say something that everyone knows to the point of the observation being trite? I think there's a good answer to that question, and I think the answer is that Epicurus sees the importance in engaging in the "hypotheticals" game - the game of abstractions which can easily lead to disaster, but which most people are taken in by to some degree, and which therefore has to be deprogrammed from him.

I don't think Epicurus ever meant anyone to even dream of only eating bread and water, and he himself certainly did not. But by engaging in the hypothetical you meet Plato head-on and beat him at his own game.

Unfortunately the hazard we are experiencing is that if your explanatory books get purged out of existence, and Platonists completely take over the world, then people stop understanding the

context of your statement, and think you are being literal, and then either dismiss you as ridiculous or interpret you in a way that makes sense to them, but turns your own views upside down.

[Quote from Don](#)

listen to his body's natural limit and not eat to the point of pain

Isn't that another observation that is so borderline "childish" that it is a good clue that something more profound is intended? How many people after they pass the age of five or six fail to understand that overeating ice cream leads to pain? Yes, some of us do it anyway, but we certainly understand the likely result of our actions and don't have anyone to blame but ourselves if we overeat anyway.

The best explanation for those observations is what I think Torquatus said, which is that the discussion allows us to see "the principle of the classification" -

Quote

One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural without being necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary; the principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little, since nature's own riches, which suffice to content her, are both easily procured and limited in amount; but for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered.

So I think one of the major principles behind the differences of opinion that people have (which I am often referring to as the "ascetic" vs the "classical" model) is that because people are not approaching these texts as a "principled" or a "philosophical" dispute, they are trying to interpret these words as immediate practical advice.

This is a big mistake because what they are instead is really the high-level abstractions that are needed if you are debating with [Philebus](#) and Socrates, and talking about the "summum bonum" or the "*the final and ultimate Good, which as philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the End to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else.*"

When you are debating with Plato on the summum bonum, you talk in terms of "pleasure" and "pain" and "natural" and "necessary" and "limits" and "vain" other such words which are loaded with philosophical meaning, but not with "practical meaning" unless you place them in an individual context. The letter to Menoeceus from which most of these issues spring is an extremely high-level discussion of the goal of life and the "principles" to follow. If you try to read it as a "[to-do list](#) that everyone should follow today" then you end up with bread and water

in your cave, instead of living the rich and full life that Epicurus certainly would have intended.

Post by “Cassius” of April 27, 2021 at 9:33 AM

I see I had the thread entitled "mutimedia" instead of "multimedia." Probably the original version was better, but I didn't want anyone to be distracted by my spelling, so I fixed it!

Post by “Don” of April 27, 2021 at 2:20 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And I think that "IF" is the key. It's not necessary; Epicurus knows it's not necessary; we know it's not necessary; everyone knows it's not necessary -- so why say something that everyone knows to the point of the observation being trite?

If we find ourselves in a situation where we were to only have just enough food to satisfy our hunger, we can still find pleasure. I don't think it's trite at all to make that observation. It's not necessary to be an ascetic. Firmly agree with that. But we don't need opulence to find pleasure. If we have access to opulence, that's great! Enjoy!! Saying "everyone knows" doesn't mean everyone acknowledges or practices what they know as "common sense." It is one of the jobs of the philosopher - especially one as dedicated to making the lives of everyone more pleasurable as Epicurus did - to hold up a mirror to people to get them to examine how they are living their lives.

Seneca says that Epicurus "used to observe stated intervals" where he would sparingly eat to test how much was necessary to satiate his hunger **as an experiment**. This is most likely the genesis of the whole bread and water "myth."

Pointing out "childish" common sense strategies doesn't rule out the opportunity to declare and defend profound philosophical truths. Epicurus was fighting on two fronts: arguing against the Platonists etc al one the one hand, and providing practical guidance for everyday life to common people on the other.

The Letter to Menoikeus isn't meant to be a philosophical treatise arguing against Plato but a practical summary of ethical teachings to his student. I agree it's not meant as a step-by-step "[to-do list](#)" but it's not meant to be deciphered like some sort of philosophical code either.

Epicurus's straightforward, clear writing style is meant to say what he meant. I agree people try to extrapolate principles into absolutes, and I don't think Epicurus was saying live in a cave. But I do think he encouraged people to examine how they were living their lives and if what they were doing actually brought pleasure. The categories were a helpful shorthand to jump start that examination.

Post by “Cassius” of April 27, 2021 at 3:02 PM

I don't have much more to offer at this point, but in glancing at [an article by David Konstan on Epicurean Physics](#), I see he makes a point similar to that which we are discussing -- that there are multiple levels of significance in textual issues that can at first appear very simple:

SOME SURPRISING AND INGENIOUS propositions have been attributed to Epicurus, and to some extent to Democritus, in modern interpretations of ancient atomic theory. These propositions betray a serious involvement by the atomists with the physical and philosophical implications of their doctrines on matter and the void. In place of commonsensical notions about small hard bodies falling or knocking about in space, we now find such sophisticated ideas as quantized space and time, discontinuous motion, theoretical minima—ideas comparable in their subtlety to the Eleatic paradoxes, which, as it seems, they were intended to resolve.¹ The advantage of these new interpretations is that they render a more satisfactory account of difficult arguments and principles in the Epicurean texts, they place the atomists squarely in the tradition of ancient philosophy from Parmenides through Aristotle, and they reveal a degree of philosophical intelligence behind ancient atomism that makes it a stimulating subject for investigation. At the same time they raise new problems, inconsistencies, and paradoxes which demand still further analytical machinery for their solution. Not that there is any cause for consternation in this fact. Even the most refined theories of modern physics produce singularities, limiting cases, and other conceptual potholes where the structure breaks down. It is entirely to be expected that a deeper analysis of the premises of ancient atomism should uncover new dilemmas, which in turn make fresh demands on the theory. There is nevertheless the real danger that in pursuing such lines of speculation as far as possible, we may begin to lose touch with the ancient texts and wander about in intellectual regions which, however fascinating in themselves, have little or nothing to do with the thought of Epicurus and his followers. That is, even if the problems we discover are real ones for the theory, the Epicureans may have been unaware of them or unimpressed by them, and in either case may not have given them much thought. But sometimes engagement with the theoretical issues in their own right points to new significance in familiar texts or brings together apparently unrelated propositions in such a way as to suggest strongly a coherent address to the problems posed. At all events, this is the method of exposition which I have adopted: to raise what seem to me problems and paradoxes in Epicurean atomism, to respond to them, as far as I can, using the intellectual apparatus of the ancient theory, and to indicate, where possible, how the texts support the reconstructions which I offer.

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The present article is a revised and expanded version of the first three sections of a paper distributed by