

# The Pocket Epicurean by John Sellars

Post by “Joshua” of September 22, 2021 at 10:59 PM

Upcoming publication: a companion edition to *The Pocket Stoic*, published last year.

*The Pocket Epicurean* by John Sellars

Will Publish December 2021

Cloth-Bound \$12.50

University of Chicago Press

Author:

## Quote

John Sellars is a Reader in Philosophy at Royal Holloway, University of London, a Visiting Research Fellow at King’s College London (where he is an Associate Editor for the Ancient Commentators on Aristotle project), and a member of Wolfson College, Oxford (where he was once a Junior Research Fellow).

Description:

## Quote

A short, smart guide to living the good life through the teachings of Epicurus.

As long as there has been human life, we’ve searched for what it means to be happy. More than two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher Epicurus came to his own conclusion: all we really want in life is pleasure. Though today we tend to associate the word “Epicurean” with indulgence in the form of food and wine, the philosophy of Epicurus was about a life well lived even in the hardest of times. As John Sellars shows in this concise, approachable guide, the ideal life envisioned by Epicurus and his followers was a life much more concerned with mental pleasures and the avoidance of pain. Their goal, in short, was a life of tranquility or contentment.

In *The Pocket Epicurean* Sellars walks us through the history of Epicureanism, starting with the private garden on the edge of ancient Athens where Epicurus and his students lived in the fourth century BC, and where women were as welcome as men. Sellars then moves on to ancient Rome, where Epicurean influence flourished thanks to the poet

Lucretius and his cohort. Throughout the book, Sellars draws on the ideas of Epicurus to offer a constructive way of thinking about the pleasures of friendship and our place in the world.

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This will be a good opportunity for a timely and topical discussion of a short, manageable and inexpensive book at the time of its publication. His prior work is heavily Stoical. Shall we expect to be Tranquil-ized? Let's find out!

Mark your calendars!

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## Post by “Don” of September 23, 2021 at 4:20 AM

I did a quick search of Sellars at Academia.edu and didn't see anything specifically on Epicureanism. Lots of articles, papers, book chapters on the minutiae of Stoicism, Aristotle, Hadot, Marcus Aurelius, and Hellenistic philosophy in general with a smattering of Epicurus and Lucretius.

[https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C36&q=john+sellars&btnG=](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C36&q=john+sellars&btnG=)

There is a general Google Scholar search.

So his major Research interest lies in Stoicism with a general interest in Hellenistic philosophy. I guess we'll see.

Thanks for the heads-up, [Joshua](#) !!!

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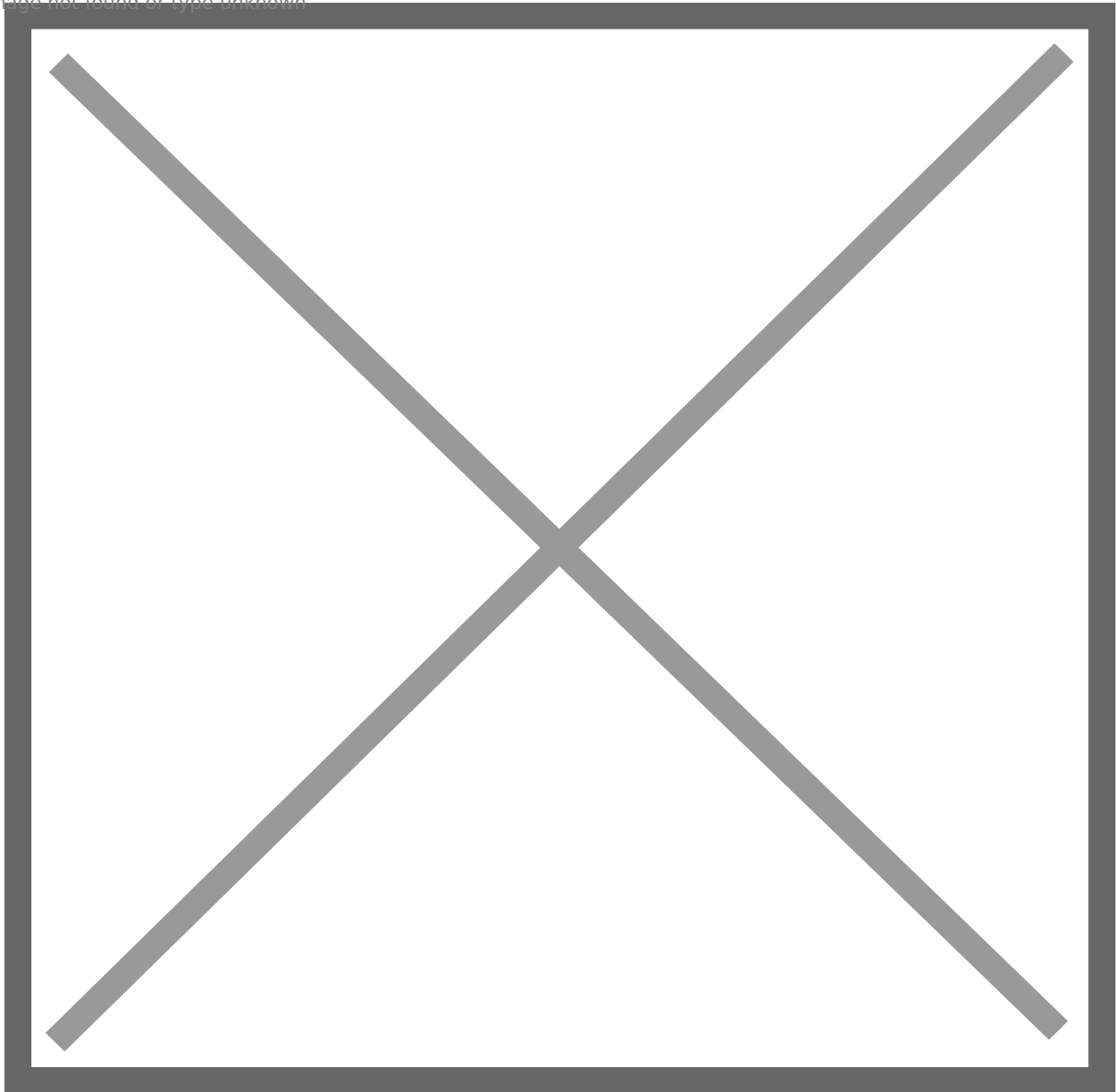
### **Post by “Don” of September 23, 2021 at 4:27 AM**

Yeah, he definitely seems to be a member of the modern Stoic movement:

<http://www.johnsellars.org.uk/popular-writing.html>

Okay, if we go back to 2003...

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[Materialism and Ethics \(2003\)](#)

From The Philosopher, Volume LXXXI No. 2 Autumn 2003 MATERIALISM AND ETHICS: Learning from Epicurus By John Sellars A s...  
[www.the-philosopher.co.uk](http://www.the-philosopher.co.uk)

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**Post by “Cassius” of September 23, 2021 at 6:06 AM**

"All we really want in life is pleasure."

I don't think sentence rings Epicurean, and that's a tip-off. I think we (and Epicurus too) are all familiar with people who have convinced themselves that pain and hardship are to be pursued in themselves. From Torquatus in "On Ends" - " But I must explain to you how all this mistaken idea of reprobating pleasure and extolling pain arose."

"a life well lived even in the hardest of times"

I think that's actually a very good formulation - better than he probably realizes given the rest of his views of Epicurus. For me, I am convinced that Epicurus' fundamental starting point was exactly that - to compare the alternatives (theism, idealism) and determine which one is well lived in the sens of \*true\* (meaning consistent with reality and nature). That's how you end up realizing that Nature gives us only pleasure and pain as stop and go signals, and that's why you end up with pleasure as the goal - not because you're soft and indulgent and just want to hide in your hole and escape pain, but because your rigorously and vigorously clear-eyed about the reality of life.

\* \* \*

You combine the text which Joshua quoted with the Stoic background both Don and Joshua cite and what do you come up with?

The nine-hundred ninety-ninth example that - if you are a writer grounded in England - you are seemingly of necessity going to be so "stoic" (small "s") that you would make Marcus Aurelius himself shake his head in embarrassment.

I don't really get that same vibe from David Sedley, so I have to question whether Sedley is really an Englishman. 😊 The situation is bad enough that it would make Epicurus himself doubt the existence of the swerve! 😊

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## Post by "Bryan" of September 23, 2021 at 11:35 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

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Very well said, thank you. Carpe Diem!