

The Facial Expression of Epicurus

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 14, 2023 at 6:38 PM

I often wish that the imagery of Epicurus had more "warmth", however smiling in portraiture is a late modern phenomenon which came about following advances in photographic technology.

Back in ancient times, for the likeness to be captured correctly I would imagine that people would sit and pose for the sculptor.

In early photography the subject had to hold still for a certain length of time.

Mark Twain had this to say: "A photograph is a very important document, and there is nothing more damning for posterity than a silly smile captured forever."

Likely people in ancient Greece felt the same (about sculptures), and this article sheds further light:

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[Why Is No One Smiling in Classic Portraits and Photographs? | Blog | Domestika](#)

Learn why smiling was so uncommon in paintings and early photographs "Smile!" We listen to this phrase practically every time we pose for a photograph....

www.domestika.org

Post by “Bryan” of December 14, 2023 at 7:17 PM

I agree. Let me throw these into the mix.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3590-the-facial-expression-of-epicurus/>

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 14, 2023 at 7:25 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I often wish that the imagery of Epicurus had more "warmth"

We felt the same way. 😊



Post by “Kalosyni” of December 14, 2023 at 9:03 PM

Okay, I have been pondering this (which I didn't fully explain in the first post above) ...bear with me here...I think that there is a time and place for a "smiling Epicurus"...

...but I am now thinking that perhaps that place is in one's imagination. Likely if Epicurus was teaching about the nature of things (atoms and void, etc.) then he had a serious expression. Smiling evolved from primates as a [sign of submission](#), and even now a lecturer or [presenter who smiles too much](#) appears less confident.

So I am thinking now that the Epicurus who represents the teachings should be somewhat serious looking.

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 14, 2023 at 10:26 PM

I have to defer to the recommendation of Diogenes of Oinoanda who wrote that "**the statues of the gods should be made genial and smiling, so that we may smile back at them, rather than be afraid of them.**"

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 15, 2023 at 7:26 AM

Sometime in the future I would hope that our logo could be upgraded...and I would propose a knowing face (neither smiling nor frowning).

Future Logo Upgrade Proposal - upgrade the face of Epicurus

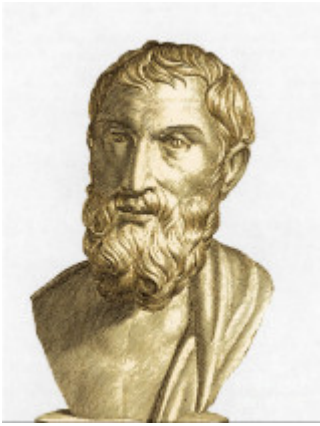
Current Logo:



Sources for new drawings:



It looks likely that the source for the current drawing might have been this:



But you can see it is a slightly different facial expression on our logo.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 15, 2023 at 8:01 AM

Of course everyone has individual preferences. I notice too that whether the face is looking directly forward or 3/4 angle also changes the feeling...as does eyes looking up or straight forward. And whether there is a slight smile - that is up to individual perception perhaps (how slight a smile could be to qualify as as being slight).

Post by “Cassius” of December 15, 2023 at 9:23 AM

I just realized that I don't think my preferred description is in the poll options. I would opt for "serious" and would see that as having a different connotation from "stern" or "disapproving." I generally see Epicurus as happy and upbeat, but if one single image had to be preserved for all time, it would probably be a look of seriousness at confronting what a mess the standard philosophers and religions had made of the world, and an earnest desire to change it.

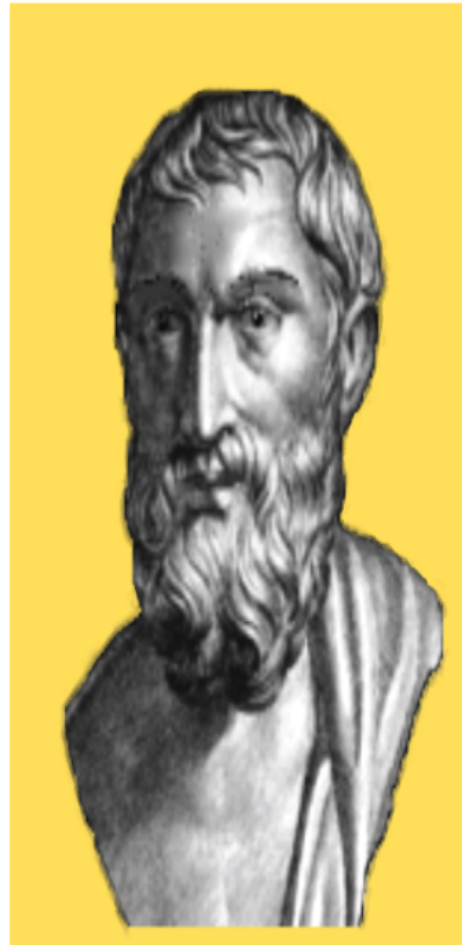
Post by “Kalosyni” of December 15, 2023 at 10:35 AM

I would say that "serious" falls into "a knowing face (neither smiling nor frowning)".

Furrowed brows and
wrinkled forehead



I would label this as
a stern face.



An attempt at softening the face
(but didn't have a high resolution
file so turned out blurry). Perhaps
this is appears too soft.

Post by "Pacatus" of December 15, 2023 at 3:22 PM

I doubt that any one image can capture anything close to "the whole of the man." I use mostly the three below (in no particular order), depending on my mood or intuition of the moment:



Post by "Pacatus" of December 15, 2023 at 4:07 PM

Interesting: Heraclitus was known as the weeping philosopher (grieving the state of the world), while Democritus was known as the laughing philosopher (with some argument over whether that was a mocking laughter at the state of the world, or – my preferred interpretation – trying to inject some cheer into the world, since cheerfulness was a main virtue for Democritus).

Perhaps, for Epicurus, a visage that captures at once his sadness at “what a mess the standard philosophers and religions had made of the world;” his sincere (serious) determination to right those wrongs as best he can, out of compassion for humanity; and a bit of a good-humored smile and twinkle in the eyes that reflect that compassion and kindness. At least, that’s the way I like to see it. And in that vein, I think that Genevra Catalano’s (Nate’s wife’s) rendering of the elder Epicurus (on the right of the three renderings I posted above) captures all of that the best. (The one on the left is by Allesandro Tomassi, and I posted it before with attribution; it reminds me of a person wise beyond his years that I briefly knew.)

Note: Catalano’s "Epicurus Dines" (also available on Etsy) shows a more pensive Epicurus.



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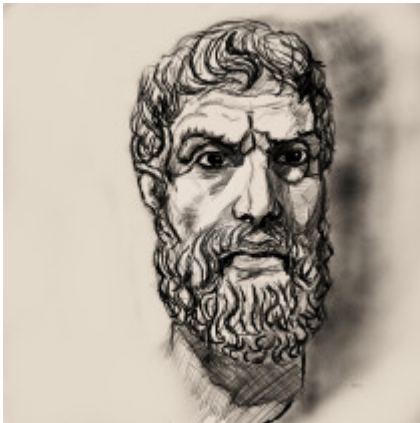
Democritus:

“Best is for a person to live a cheerful life as little distressed as possible.”

“A life without festivity is a long road without an inn.”

“cheerfulness”: Democritus’ Greek word was *euthumia*, which could also mean tranquility and contentment (cheerfulness is the predominant translation). Cheerfulness becomes a practice and a discipline that is seldom effortless.

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 15, 2023 at 4:13 PM



Epicure in Charcoal by splatteredvenue (2007)



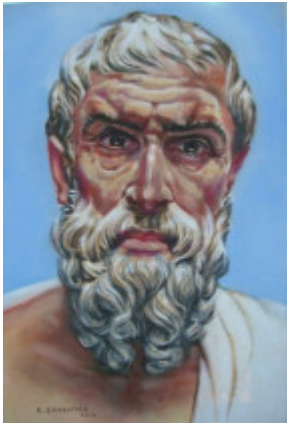
Epicure Part 2 by splatteredvenue (2007)



Epicurus (wrongly titled Plato) by Rubens in 1638 (BM Asset 876575001)



Epicurus & Seneca by Guia do Estudante



Epicurus by Evi Sarantea (2012)



Epicurus by fogbird



Epicurus by Gijs Kast Huijgen



Epicurus By Granger

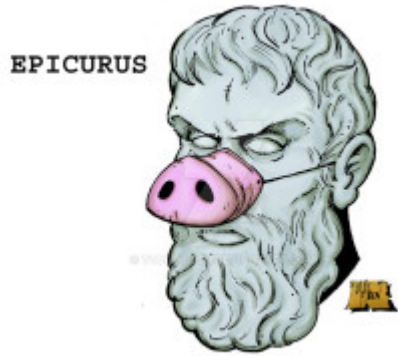


Epicurus by Lucy Calder



Epicurus by Martin Rowson

Post by "Eikadistes" of December 15, 2023 at 4:16 PM



Epicurus by YouriAlden (2013)



Epicurus Coloring Book (?)



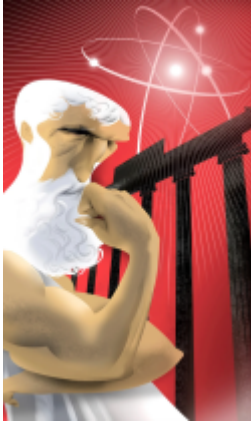
Epicurus from Ward and Lock's Illustrated History of the World (1882)



Epicurus Greek Philosopher Date by Mary Evans (2018)



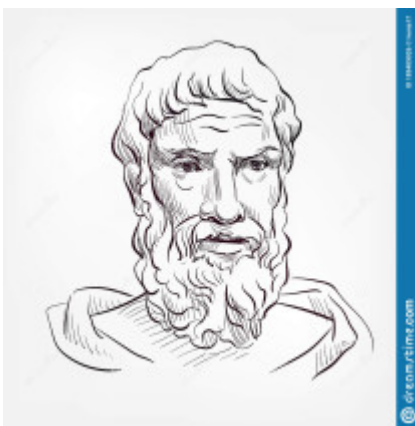
Epicurus Laughing by SimoneDebuva



Epicurus New Yorker Caricature



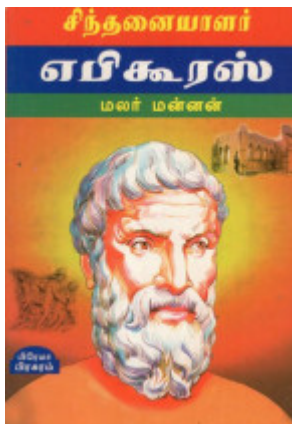
Epicurus NFT by Greek Philosophers Club



Epicurus Vector Sketch Portrait by Ivona17



Epicurus, Pemikir Kebahagiaan yang Tak Bisa Dibiarkan (indonesian)



Thinker Epicurus in Tamil

Post by “Pacatus” of December 15, 2023 at 4:38 PM

@Nate

Just for curiosity, is the red fruit in "Epicurus Dines" pomegranate (perhaps) or tomatoes or ... ?

Tomatoes would be anachronistic, but -- as a poet of sorts -- I completely affirm anachronisms as a valid and vital part of artistic license! 😊 What is important is what the images (and, in poetry, also rhythms and word-sounds) evoke.

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 15, 2023 at 6:02 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

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I recall Gen mentioning to me that she leaves it up to the observer. It is **definitely** not tomatoes, and I'm glad you brought that up, because I only learned as an adult that tomatoes were not introduced to Europe until 1521.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 15, 2023 at 6:13 PM

As I look at all the images that @Nate shared, it does seem that the low brow bone and furrowed forehead is a distinctive feature of Epicurus' face.

Post by “Don” of December 15, 2023 at 6:53 PM

It might be useful to remember all the bearded Epicurus images are based on probably 2, maybe 3, statues and maybe a ring or two(?) at most from the ancient world.

I'm disregarding the School of Athens one traditionally with the wreath and the bald one seen on various medieval or Renaissance images.

The modern ones are all jazz riffs on that ancient image.

Post by “Pacatus” of December 15, 2023 at 7:26 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

The modern ones are all jazz riffs on that ancient image.

And those few ancient images may well have been "riffs" themselves?

Post by “Don” of December 15, 2023 at 7:38 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

And those few ancient images may well have been "riffs" themselves?

Good point. Roman copies of Greek originals.

Post by “Martin” of December 15, 2023 at 10:43 PM

My impression from the visit at the Archaeological Institute in Goettingen is that the Roman copies were usually accurate. In case of the restored statue of Epicurus from the remains of two copies, even the folds of the clothing match. There are multiple copies of the same lost originals.

Post by “TauPhi” of December 16, 2023 at 1:23 AM

This is the depiction of Epicurus I like the most from the ones I've seen so far. It comes from a Polish book 'Lukrecjusz' by Kazimierz Lesniak published in 1985. There's something in the eyes that captures my attention and I think it's the closest visual representation of Epicurus to the one I have in my mind.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 16, 2023 at 2:42 PM

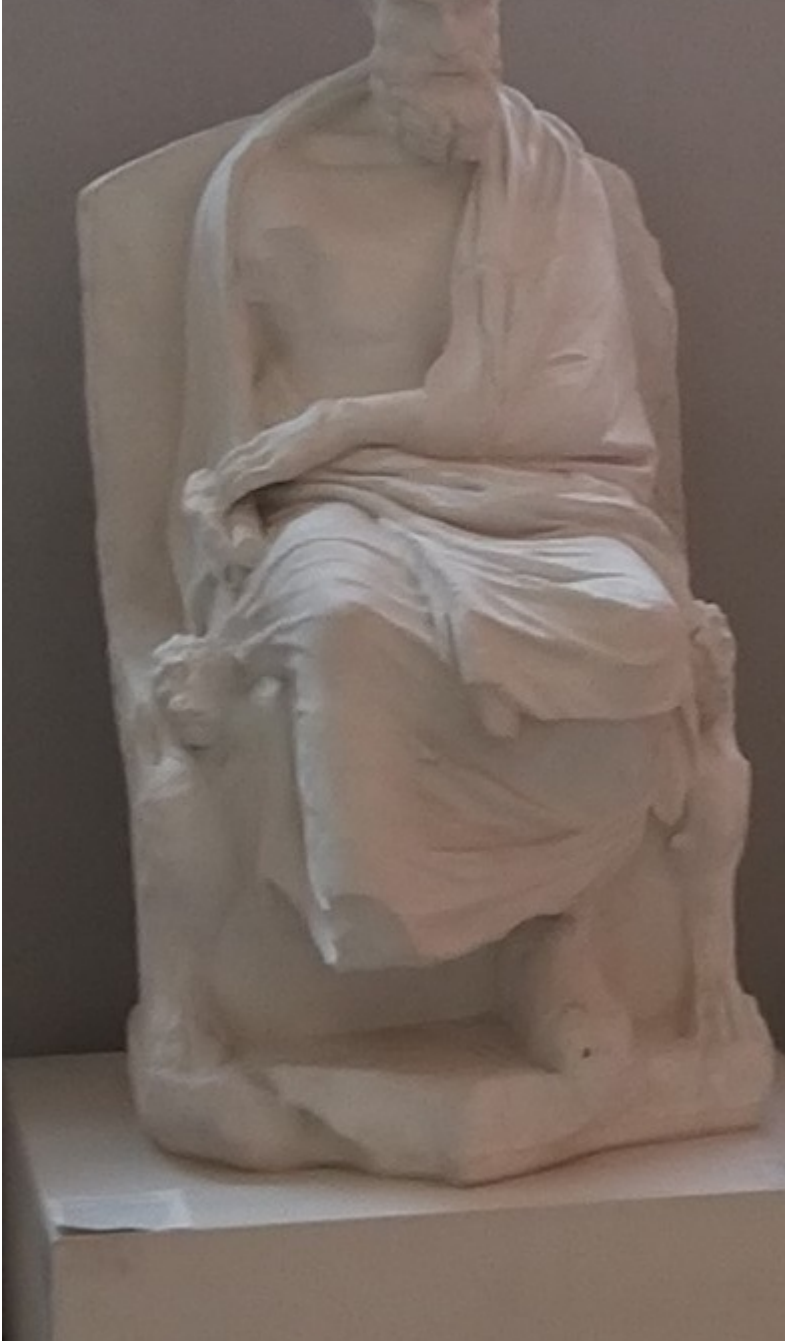
[Martin](#) do you have any close-up (just the face) and straight-on photos of Epicurus from your museum tour?

Post by “Martin” of December 16, 2023 at 11:08 PM

The second photo in comment number 11 [in the thread on my visit](#) of the institute is the closest close-up I have. I did not take a straight-on close-up because one side of the nose is missing a piece.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 18, 2023 at 9:49 AM

From Martin's photo we can see that it is a very straight look on the lips of Epicurus. Also he seems to be looking downward -- if you factor in that the statue is placed upon a pedestal then you see that that downward gaze is actually a place of power, as he is looking down at the viewer (the pedestal lifts up the form slightly higher than the viewer). So it seems that this seriousness conveys power.



As for a smile, it can convey comradery, affection, and enjoyment and as modern people I can see that we do need that conveyed at times, whether in one's imagination or in new artistic works.

And as far as creating more graphics which show Epicurus extolling the teachings, I would appreciate anyone uploading images (both serious or slight smile) which you think would help convey wisdom and the aura of a great teacher. And specifically state those that you think would work in graphics.

Post by “Pacatus” of December 18, 2023 at 4:25 PM

@Nate

I also really like Genevra's portrait of "Epicurus in the Garden" on page 114 of your book (paperback version arrived today! 😊👍). Any chance you could add that one to the thread here? Many thanks!

Post by “Eikadistes” of December 18, 2023 at 6:22 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

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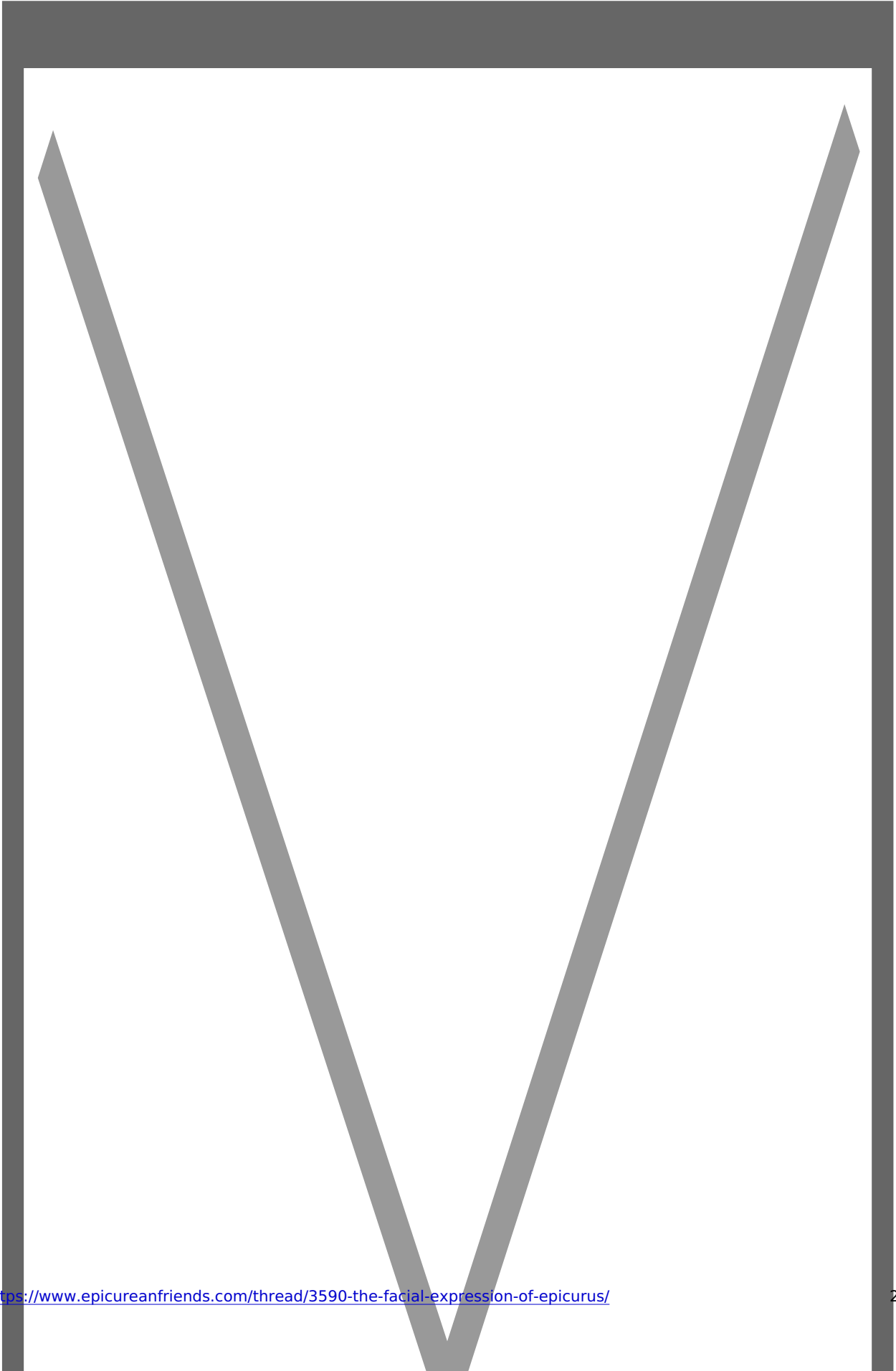
Post by “Pacatus” of December 18, 2023 at 6:24 PM

@Nate

Thanks! What I like about this one is the sense of a relaxed serenity. 😊

Post by “Joshua” of December 21, 2023 at 12:39 AM

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[Epicurus in Frankston - PichiAvo](#)

www.pichiavo.com

Quite an interesting project here!

Post by “Pacatus” of March 11, 2024 at 6:05 PM

Artists' renderings can certainly evoke a mood. Here is a painting of Zeno of Citium (I couldn't find the artist) and Genevra Catalano's Epicurus:



Post by “Kalosyni” of June 3, 2024 at 8:22 AM

Just for fun I put into an AI image generator: "laughing Epicurus" and this is what I got, and these strike me as being not very photogenic. Others who posted here in this thread above have way much better stuff (especially those which are human made art), but I decided to post these anyway because these bring up the human quality of emotions. Even though we see and think of the stern face of Epicurus in carved busts, he was a human being with emotions.



Post by “Cassius” of June 3, 2024 at 8:30 AM

I agree that the result is not particularly flattering, but the overall look and feel of the AI generation is very impressive.

We need a thread giving information on what AI generators are used, and listing the "instructions" given to the generator, so that more people can get experience in making these as foundations for new meme material.

Update: We already have one. It would be highly desirable to get this conversation going with specific tips on how to do this.

Thread

[Using New Technology To Produce More Effective Memes](#)

In addition to the new graphics that Nate's wife has been producing, I see that @Bryan has produced some new work that apparently also uses new technology.

epicureanfriends.com/wcf/gallery/image/726/

epicureanfriends.com/wcf/gallery/image/725/

When I combine my reaction to these new images with Kalosyni's recent efforts towards "motivational posters" and "pamphlets" it seems like we ought to be able to combine the two to produce striking presentations not only of persons but also...



Cassius

November 27, 2023 at 10:54 AM

Post by “TauPhi” of September 29, 2024 at 5:44 PM

I came across this short but interesting article on the topic of Epicurus' appearance:

'How the portrait of the Athenian philosopher Epicurus became known to us' by Takis Panagiotopoulos:

https://www.epicuros.gr/pages/en/Panagiotopoulos_EpicurusPortrait.pdf

Post by “Kalosyni” of April 23, 2025 at 8:19 AM

This shows how important eyebrows are to the physical appearance of intelligence. (I did this digitally with my tablet and stylus pen). I changed the lips, but thinking that I could add back in

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3590-the-facial-expression-of-epicurus/>

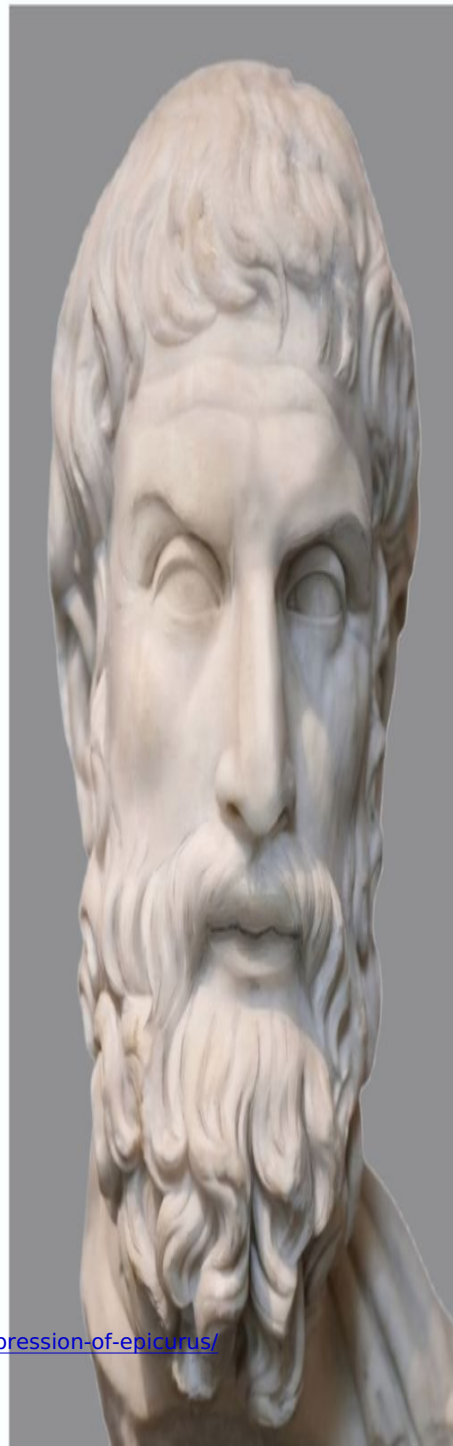
some thickness. Also the forehead may need a bit more work.

Epicurus bust retouched by hand

Before:



After:



Post by “Cassius” of April 23, 2025 at 8:38 AM

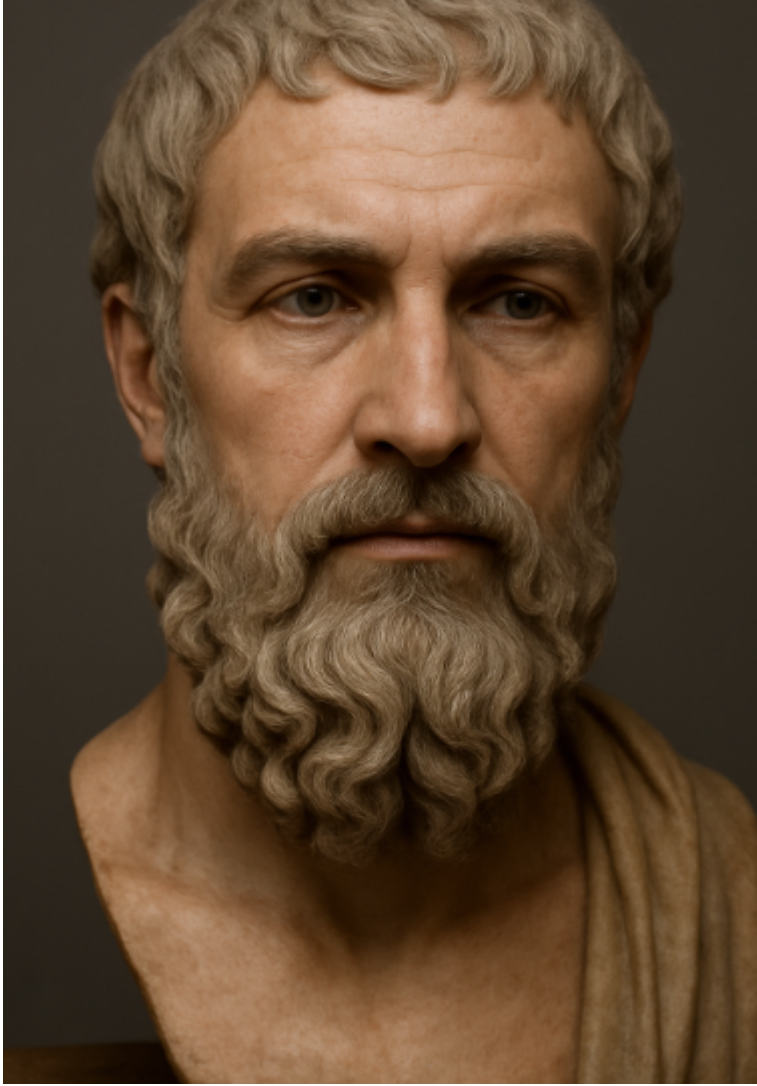
That gives a 100% improved result that is much more consistent with the other representations.

Post by “Cassius” of April 23, 2025 at 8:41 AM

After you've played with that for a while I'd like to post a version of that over on Facebook and make the revised version available in a reasonably high resolution, perhaps accompanied by colorized versions that reconstruct the idea that the ancient statues were painted.

Post by “vlasalv” of April 23, 2025 at 9:48 AM

Asked ChatGPT to work futher the 'after' image and it generated this:



I love generative AI! 😄

Post by “Eikadistes” of April 23, 2025 at 9:59 AM

I really, really, really want to recommend never using ChatGPT.

I'm going to be a broken record and annoy everyone until it stops.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3590-the-facial-expression-of-epicurus/>

There are thousands of artists out there who are HUNGRY for commissions, many of whom are friends, and can no longer work because of AI and other plagiarism programs.

Please be reminded: everyone in here is so much smarter and more creative than AI.

Don't defer to it for any reason, ever, under any circumstances.

Post by “Cassius” of April 23, 2025 at 12:44 PM

I am sympathetic to Eikadistes ' view and will solicit comments from the moderators about how we can balance competing interests.

Even more than that, however, I need to review where we are on disk space and figure out a way to make sure that we keep image uploads that aren't long-term assets under control.

On that point too I'll ask for comments (separate thread) as we need to consider recommending some sort of image-sharing site so that people know how to post large images and then just post the links here. That will show up the same way but won't permanently occupy disk space here.

So far we have had no real issues but we are now in our tenth year and we probably need to reevaluate disk space issues.

UPDATE: [Image Sharing Alternatives](#)