

Finding Cultural / Artistic / Musical Variations on Four Key Epicurean Themes

Post by "Cassius" of October 20, 2021 at 8:55 AM

Here are four key ideas I'd like to focus on to solicit examples of the same ideas that may not be mainstream or popular, but still have found at least some expression in "modern popular culture. " The four are:

1. **Live like there are no supernatural gods (because there aren't).**
2. **Live like you are dying (because you are).**
3. **Live like mental and physical pleasure is the only thing worth living for (because it is).**
4. **Live like there is no absolute virtue (because there isn't, other than the prudence that comes from knowing that (1), (2), and (3) above are absolutely true).**

In the section below I have listed various references from the ancient texts that support each one, and I have also included at least one "music video" that might apply. The point of this post is to solicit additional videos or pictures or links that support each point. I want to emphasize is that any single work of art is likely to be tightly tied to a particular point in time and space - to a particular generation, or group of people, or language group - that probably doesn't translate well between groups. Lovers of classical music can't be expected to appreciate rap, or vice versa, and boomers, zoomers, millenials, and all the rest have their own cultural reference points and often don't like art that's based in other perspectives.

In my case, I am pretty much totally unaware of major cultural or artistic works outside my own experience, but that doesn't mean that good cultural iconography doesn't exist across the spectrum for these points from Epicurus, because they are truly universal in application to all human beings. Not everyone is going to like each work of art, but we can't even begin to appreciate what's out there and consider how it can be used to support Epicurean doctrines if we don't know of its existence.

So with that as background please extend the thread with suggestions by listing the one of the four you are addressing and how your suggested work of art fits with it. If you are a suggesting a music video please provide a link with lyrics if you possibly can.

Live like there are no supernatural gods (because there aren't).

1. Song possibilities:

1. "Imagine" (John Lennon)

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNnFFKv_Nyl

2. Texts:

1. [PD01](#). "The blessed and immortal nature knows no trouble itself, nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak."
2. [PD12](#). "A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe, but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that, without natural science, it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed."
3. Lucretius Book Two [1090] "These things, if you rightly apprehend, Nature will appear free in her operations, wholly from under the power of domineering deities, and to act all things voluntarily, and of herself, without the assistance of gods. For Oh - the undisturbed bosoms of the powers above, blessed with sacred peace! How they live in everlasting ease, a life void of care! Who can rule this infinite Universe? Who has the power to hold the mighty reigns of government in his hands over this whole mass? Who likewise can turn about all these heavens? And cherish all these fruitful globes of Earth with celestial heat? Who can be present at all times, and in all places? To darken the world with clouds, to shake the vast expansion of the serene heavens with noise; to dart the thunder, and often overturn his own temples, to fly into the wilderness, and furiously brandish that fiery bolt, which often passes by the guilty, and strikes dead the innocent and undeserving?" (Brown 1743)
4. [Epicurus' Letter to Herodotus](#) [77] "Furthermore, the motions of the heavenly bodies and their turnings and eclipses and risings and settings, and kindred phenomena to these, must not be thought to be due to any being who controls and ordains or has ordained them and at the same time enjoys perfect bliss together with immortality (for trouble and care and anger and kindness are not consistent with a life of blessedness, but these things come to pass where there is weakness and fear and dependence on neighbors). Nor again must we believe that they, which are but fire agglomerated in a mass, possess blessedness, and voluntarily take upon themselves these movements. But we must preserve their full majestic significance in all expressions which we apply to such conceptions, in order that there may not arise out of them opinions contrary to this notion of majesty. Otherwise this very contradiction will cause the greatest disturbance in men's souls. Therefore we must believe that it is due to the original inclusion of matter in such agglomerations during the birth-process of the world that this law of regular succession is also brought about."

- **Live like you are dying (because you are).**

1. Song possibilities

1. "live like you were dying" (Tim McGraw)

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjRXGqRofE4>

2. Texts:

1. [PD02. Death is nothing to us](#), for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us.
2. [VS10](#). Remember that you are mortal, and have a limited time to live, and have devoted yourself to discussions on Nature for all time and eternity, and have seen "things that are now and are to come and have been."
3. VS14. We are born once and cannot be born twice, but for all time must be no more. But you, who are not master of tomorrow, postpone your happiness. Life is wasted in procrastination, and each one of us dies while occupied.
4. VS30. Some men, throughout their lives, spend their time gathering together the means of life, for they do not see that the draught swallowed by all of us at birth is a draught of death.
5. VS47. "I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and I have closed off every one of your devious entrances. And we will not give ourselves up as captives, to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who cling to it maundering, we will leave from life singing aloud a glorious triumph-song on how nicely we lived."
6. VS60. "Every man passes out of life as though he had just been born."

- Live like mental and physical pleasure is the only thing worth living for (because it is)

1. Song possibilities:

1. Il Divo Feelings -

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

2. Texts:

1. "Torquatus" from Cicero's "On Ends" - The problem before us then is, what is the climax and standard of things good, and this in the opinion of all philosophers must needs be such that we are bound to test all things by it, but the standard itself by nothing. Epicurus places this standard in pleasure, which he lays down to be the supreme good, while pain is the supreme evil...." (Reid)
2. "Torquatus" from Cicero's "On Ends" - "Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension."

- Live like there is no absolute virtue (because there isn't, other than the prudence that comes from knowing that (1), (2), and (3) above are absolutely true.

1. Song Possibilities:

1. This one is harder and this is only for starters:

1. Elvis Presley / Frank Sinatra - My Way

2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pckT_bzZ8oU

2. Texts:

1. VS13. Among the things held to be just by law, whatever is proved to be of advantage in men's dealings has the stamp of justice, whether or not it be the same for all; but if a man makes a law and it does not prove to be mutually advantageous, then this is no longer just. And if what is mutually advantageous varies, and only for a time corresponds to our concept of justice, nevertheless for that time it is just, for those who do not trouble themselves about empty words, but look simply at the facts.
2. VS58. "We must free ourselves from the prison of public education and politics."
3. [VS71](#). "Every desire must be confronted by this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished, and what if it is not?"
4. "Torquatus" from Cicero's "On Ends" [42] This being so, it is plain that all right and praiseworthy action has the life of pleasure for its aim. Now inasmuch as the climax or goal or limit of things good (which the Greeks term telos) is that object which is not a means to the attainment of any thing else, while all other things are a means to its attainment, we must allow that the climax of things good is to live agreeably. XIII. Those who find this good in virtue and virtue only, and dazzled by the glory of her name, fail to perceive what it is that nature craves, will be emancipated from heresy of the deepest dye, if they will deign to lend ear to Epicurus. For unless your grand and beautiful virtues were productive of pleasure, who would suppose them to be either meritorious or desirable? Yes, just as we regard with favour the physician's skill not for his art's sake merely but because we prize sound health, and just as the pilot's art is praised on utilitarian and not on artistic grounds, because it supplies the principles of good navigation, so wisdom, which we must hold to be the art of living, would be no object of desire, if it were productive of no advantage; but it is in fact desired, because it is to us as an architect that plans and accomplishes pleasure."
5. Diogenes of Oinoanda, Inscription, Fragment 32: "If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end." (Smith)