

An Epicurean Understanding of Valentine's Day: Love, Romance, and Free-will

Post by "Cassius" of February 8, 2022 at 9:30 AM

Those are great issues to discuss Smoothiekiwi. One of them is the question of "divorce" vs "til death to us part." I don't know if anyone here would advocate in favor of abolition of divorce, so we're probably talking in the context that "divorce" is at least a partial answer to your concerns.

Then there are the issues of

(1) children, which I think most people (apparently not including Plato!) would agree are best raised in a stable family.

(2) and protection and financial stability of women, who are apt to be put in extremely poor financial positions if the commitment that is made in raising a family or being married in general is not long term.

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

But by marrying, the person essentially gives up their ataraxia for an unknown future.

But that last is the formulation I would most push back against. As in some other current threads where we are discussing pain and pleasure, I don't think that Epicurus was unrealistic about pain: pain is required in order to live to any degree, and more pain is often required for more pleasure. So while "Absence of disturbance" and "absence of pain" are goals in the Epicurean system, they are not in themselves the ultimate goal or the highest goal. PLEASURE trumps both of those, and we can and do accept some degree of both disturbance and pain in order to achieve the pleasures we want in life.

Posing the question in this way really exhibits - in my view - how terrible a mistake it is to postulate ataraxia and aponia as the highest goods rather than pleasure. (And I will add that it makes it worse to leave them untranslated, because that makes it harder for newer people to understand what really is being discussed.) When you make it clear what is involved, it seems to me that it's easy to see that OF COURSE the avoidance of disturbance and the avoidance of pain do not trump all other considerations. Over and over Epicurus makes that clear, and in those situations where it can be argued that he seems to be saying something else, you override that interpretation by looking to the foundations and the full context of the philosophy, and adopt a construction that is consistent with both - not a construction that would blow the philosophy to smithereens if adopted (as some, regretfully, do).