

The Absurdity of Absurdism (?)

Post by “Little Rocker” of July 5, 2024 at 3:01 PM

This is a great conversation! So maybe it would help for a moment to take it out of the more modern, Camus context, and put it in the Ancient and Epicurean context. I say that in part because I'm not sure Epicurus and his contemporaries actually thought the central problem to solve was suffering. So in the Ancient context:

First, for reasons that remain somewhat unclear, Democritus claimed to laugh at humanity, and some later texts turned this into a kind of a maniacal laughter at human absurdity. So there was some at least popular understanding that atomism makes it ridiculous to take various human activities seriously. Second, we of course have that Lucretius passage where he's looking down from the enlightened perspective of philosophy on all the idiots living their daily lives.

So as I understand it, absurdity depends on two perspectives, the one that inhabits life from the subjective experience and the one that looks down on it from a dispassionate, critical perspective, whether that's 'gods-eye view' or 'the perspective of the universe.' And when you occupy the dispassionate perspective, the upshot is supposedly something like 'all these activities are meaningless,' but then life forces you to return to your subjective experience and treat all those things as if they're meaningful nonetheless. And that can be disorienting.

But I suspect Epicurus is trying to avoid that by showing that the gods-eye perspective and our own lives can mirror one another, or coincide. I was recently reading a James Warren article and marked the following passage, which I think will resonate with [Cassius](#) :

Quote

'It seems quite possible that someone will not laugh constantly at his fellow humans once he has come to the Epicurean godlike view of the universe, nor will he cease to live a life, and take pleasure in living that life. That is not to say, however, that he will be living with an unchanged subjective view of his life and its pleasure, with a new objective view running concurrently. *Physiologia* does not leave intact all previous values....The agent will take pleasure in living a life, in friends, in various pursuits, and is always fully conscious that this finite and particular life takes place within a universe of infinite *kosmoi*, made of infinite atoms infinitely moving in an infinite void. Yet that cosmology does not devalue the life; pleasures are still pleasures and so are still valuable *per se*. It is still possible to attain *ataraxia*, and thus to rival the gods in the matter described in my discussion of Vatican Saying 33. Indeed, an understanding of Epicurean cosmology is an essential part of attaining *ataraxia*' ('Epicurean Immortality,' Warren).

So in other words, as I take it, there's nothing from a cosmic perspective that makes pleasure worthless. But a lot of unpleasant things we pretend are important might very well lose their meaning from a cosmic perspective.