

Is Romantic Love a Vainglory

Post by "Cassius" of November 29, 2020 at 1:30 PM

Bartleby I have not yet had a chance to absorb your full article, but this catches my eye:

Unnatural Unnecessary Pleasures (also called "Vainglories"): Like demanding some specific piece of cake. Or having a statue built to yourself. Or having to have sex with some specific person. These are desperate, insecure, fantastical, ego-driven lusts that enmesh the pleasure-seeker in delusions about how their life is meaningful because of XYZ external circumstance.

You should never indulge in these pleasures. They have no natural bounds and will devour and destroy you if you begin to dream of actually satisfying them. They molly-coddle, ratify, and encourage desire; and that destroys your most fundamental mental pleasure: freedom from desire = joyful, wide-open-conscious-space peace of mind. Not only that: Since these pleasures rob you of your senses, pursuing them is physically dangerous and they are apt to increase your physical woes.

I would disagree that Epicurus took the position which I underlined in red. As per my earlier post, the "principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little, since nature's own riches, which suffice to content her, are both easily procured and limited in amount; but for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered." This is no doubt an accurate generalization of what most people find to be the case in life, so as a general rule it makes very good sense to think about these observations before deciding what to choose and what to avoid.

But that does not mean that you should "never" pursue a pleasure which is difficult to obtain without pain. The logical conclusion of taking your position to an extreme would be to put avoidance of pain as your most important goal, and would in many cases lead to living in a cave on bread and water -- and the weight of Epicurean philosophy does not at all support such a conclusion. One of the most important reasons for that, i think, is that there is no absolute rule of what pleasures are most to be chosen, because even those pleasures that last the longest are not always to be chosen (as per the letter to Menoeceus). Epicurus does not give a list because it is the individual's faculty of pleasure which is the test for that individual - there is no platonic ideal list of pleasures which are "best" for all people at all times and all places to pursue. In the absence of such a list, it is the faculty of pleasure alone which a person can look to for the answer on what to pursue and what to avoid, and so use of the word "never" in this context is something I think which would violate basic premises of Epicurean philosophy.