

The Wider Implications Of the Epicurean Warnings About Passionate Love

Post by “Cassius” of March 7, 2016 at 4:48 PM

Excerpts from Facebook discussion:

HDJ: I'd like to add my two cents from a bystander's point of view. There are many rigorous scientific articles showing many benefits of the act of sex. Maybe Epicurus might have chosen his words differently with the knowledge we have today?

[Cassius Amicus](#) I agree with what I think you are saying, HDJ, but I think the problem is not so much that he chose his words poorly (and that might be an issue with translation) but that we only have fragments without the overall context. He seems to have been addressing someone who was clearly so over-indulging in this department that he was causing trouble for himself or others (else why would the topic even be addressed?). I don't think Epicurus was unaware of the benefits of sex and certainly he was not unaware of its pleasure. But it seems that the parts of Epicurean texts which survive are heavily slanted toward Epicurus warning someone *against* doing something in particular that is pleasurable, while those which certainly would have existed *encouraging* the pursuit of pleasure are only the general statements.

I think we could compare the phrase that is preserved about Pythocles, that "if you wish to make Pythocles rich, do not give him more money, but restrain his desires." To me, this is one of those sayings that CLEARLY can be only understood if we know the pre-existing state of Pythocles. Is he rich and cynical and degenerate from wasting money? Then yes, restrain his desire for money. But is Pythocles poor and at the point of death and wishing only for a few of the common ordinary "luxuries" of life? Then I cannot imagine that Epicurus would say such a thing to such a pitiful person.

I strongly suspect that the surviving fragments come to us reflecting "cherry-picking" by stoics and their sympathizers who wanted to preserve sayings from Epicurus with which they agreed, or which they could shape to their own uses.

Fortunately someone also preserved for us VS 63. "There is also a limit in simple living, and he who fails to understand this falls into an error as great as that of the man who gives way to extravagance." I think [VS63](#), if thoroughly considered and applied, is the key to blowing away all the stoicisms that have clung onto Epicurean theory like barnacles.

And if you apply [VS63](#) to your question you come up with the same conclusion you have reached, that ALL activity, even/especially sex, has to be evaluated in context of the situation that applies. And as you note, in general, sex is a natural and healthy and pleasurable part of

life.