

Carl Sagan, the 4th dimension, episode 20 of Lucretius Today, physics

Post by "Don" of August 19, 2021 at 8:01 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

what is included in "pleasure" is extremely broad.

[Note: This turned into more of a personal statement than a direct response to this thread in the composing. I may end up moving it to my wall, but for now, here it is.]

It may be "extremely broad" but it's not limitless. From my reading, Epicurus's philosophy (as primarily transmitted to us through his writings, Lucretius, and Philodemus)* is one of rigorous personal responsibility for one's choices and a pursuit of the "health of the body and the serenity of the mind — since that is the goal of a completely blessed life." (Letter to Menoikeus) While it is true there are *numerous* personal pleasurable paths to this goal, the ancient Epicurean writers didn't shy away from discussing the "vices" that would make it difficult if not impossible to arrive at that goal. The teachers of the Garden didn't hesitate to engage their students in frank speech to "correct" their actions. It wasn't a loosey-goosey all-things-to-all-people, anything-goes, do-it-if-it-feels-good philosophy. That is more Cyrenaic than Epicurean. It's also not Platonic idealism to say some actions will generally lead to more pleasurable outcomes than others. Waffling on or downplaying some of the guardrails or boundary stones put in place by Epicurus does a disservice to the comprehensive nature of his philosophy.

That said, Epicurus doesn't give moral edicts like "no alcohol" or "no pork" or "no lying". He just said don't talk drivell when you drink, enjoy luxurious food if it is available, and no problem lying to protect your friends. The philosophy stressed the contextual nature of justice and ethics, but it also addressed the practical and expected outcomes of some of those contexts. If you drink too much for too long, you are responsible for your headache. If you are a glutton at dinner, you are responsible for your painful indigestion. If you're caught lying, you're responsible if you get caught. And Epicurus didn't shy away from calling out the negative consequences of certain actions and beliefs. The philosophy provides a more effective and practical way to live than many/most/all(?) of the alternatives, and Epicurus pointed the way without all the supernatural mumbo-jumbo.

*On sources: I'm generally distrustful of Cicero, a little more trusting of Seneca, and downright apprehensive about using the early Christian writers when they discuss Epicurus's philosophy, but we have no choice but to use them. That's why I only listed the three avowed Epicureans in the list above.