

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

Post by "Cassius" of January 16, 2022 at 3:44 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

It seems that the only way to solve this puzzle for modern times, is to use a hedonic calculus. But then how do you determine the outcome with regard to pleasure and pain? This simply could be a subjective feeling, so some people might decide that marriage results in too much pain and so will not get married...or if divorced they will not seek to get re-married. But the problem is that you sometimes can't predict the outcome. And then this: is it worth experiencing an extreme amount of emotional pain so that you can enjoy some brief times of emotional (and physical) pleasure?

This is the reasoning I would use to come to a conclusion as to what Epicurus would most likely have endorsed at the end of his life (meaning in his most mature teaching). The way to solve this puzzle or any other puzzle is the hedonic calculus.

Every question is decided by [VS71](#). "Every desire must be confronted by this question: What will happen to me if the object of my desire is accomplished, and what if it is not?"

Is the topic sex, or is it "romantic love," or is it marriage, or is "having children," or something else? It's easy to stray away from a precise question and to think that the answer to one might be the answer to the other.

A lot of the advice in Lucretius is geared toward the issue of "romanticizing" one's love interest (likely viewed as a form of intoxication) and how to sober yourself up. I won't quote all that here, but everyone needs to review the full statement by Lucretius starting at around line 1060 ([here is the link to it in Bailey](#)).

It would seem to me that Epicurus would say that while intoxication itself can have significant pleasure, what happens afterward is frequently more painful than pleasurable, so you had better be extremely cautious about being intoxicated.

Is that a flat ban against marriage, or children, or sex, or romance? I would say "clearly not." Is it a statement that these activities are some of the riskiest in life where the benefit/detriment ration can frequently go out of control and veer toward a very negative result? I would say again the answer is clear - "yes."

But just as firmly as I would say that it is a very un-Epicurean generalization that Epicurus taught us to avoid pain at all costs, and thereby live an ascetic live, I don't think he would have

taught to adopt the general rule of avoiding romantic love, sex, marriage, and children.

And viewed from that perspective, like everything else in life, I think he would have said to be extremely careful handling dynamite (for example), but that if you are confident you can handle the dynamite to blast open new roads, build dams, and do things that you are confident will make your life better than otherwise, then it would certainly prudent for you to do so.