

# Is Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy Compatible with Epicureanism?

**Post by "Cassius" of May 4, 2022 at 6:44 AM**

There are a series of 'practical' observations embedded into the texts that sort of correspond to the kind of wise advice that we traditionally get from parents, or friends, etc. Examples include:

VS43. The love of money, if unjustly gained, is impious, and, if justly gained, is shameful; for it is unseemly to be parsimonious, even with justice on one's side.

VS44. The wise man, when he has accommodated himself to straits, knows better how to give than to receive, so great is the treasure of self-sufficiency which he has discovered.

VS45. The study of nature does not make men productive of boasting or bragging, nor apt to display that culture which is the object of rivalry with the many, but high-spirited and self-sufficient, taking pride in the good things of their own minds and not of their circumstances.

VS46. Let us utterly drive from us our bad habits, as if they were evil men who have long done us great harm.

VS47. I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and I have closed off every one of your devious entrances. And we will not give ourselves up as captives, to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who cling to it maundering, we will leave from life singing aloud a glorious triumph-song on how nicely we lived.

VS48. We must try to make the end of the journey better than the beginning, as long as we are journeying; but when we come to the end, we must be happy and content.

VS49. It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he does not know the Nature of the universe, but still gives some credence to myths. So, without the study of Nature, there is no enjoyment of pure pleasure.

But my main point is that everything wise to do in life isn't philosophy, which is a complete worldview. A series of "therapeutic techniques" can't take the place of a philosophy. And that's especially true since "therapy" divorced from answering questions about "Toward what goal?" can be very manipulative and even dangerous.

That's essentially what has happened in modern Stoicism, and it's why so many Stoics are confused about their philosophy and think it's so similar to Epicurean philosophy. The modern Stoics have stopped stressing their ancient foundations ("virtue" as the goal, in which pleasure is a highly negative thing) to the point where modern Stoicism has little or anything to do with what the Stoics originally developed. I would submit that modern Stoicism is in fact now focused on issues of living 'happily," while for the ancient Stoics what we think of as living "happily" was one of the major \*obstacles\* to their goal - living "virtuously."

We could take that observation off in great detail - and i think we have discussed it in the past - but the point under discussion here is not to give Stoicism a well-deserved bashing but to point out the limits of CBT / REBT. (If you want to read a bashing of Stoicism, one unexpected place to read a good one are the parts of Cicero's "On Ends" which are devoted to examining the Stoics.)

One other thing I would point out is that it's important to remember what Epicurus said about pain -- sometimes we DO choose pain in order to avoid a worse pain or achieve a greater pleasure. The "sometimes" is the issue - we have to think through carefully what our goal is and why we may choose to undergo pain.

Is "Behavioral Therapy" going to answer questions like that, if "therapy" is focused purely on "reducing pain" or "coping with pain" without answering the bigger philosophic question of whether the pain a person is going through is "appropriate"?

A medical doctor can pretty uniformly know that "treating pain" is the obvious goal. "Being tired" can be caused by all sorts of disease processes which a doctor will have medications to treat.

But what if you are "tired" because you have just engaged in lengthy exercise toward losing weight or generally improving your health? Would a doctor look to medicate away your "tiredness" simply because you are tired?

A philosophy of life has to identify the goal of living and analyze any current problems in the context of obtaining ultimate goals. Any "therapy" that represents itself as helping to adjust your behavior without first analyzing the reasons for your situation and your ultimate goals in life may just prolong the period of time of wandering in darkness.