

Epicureanism and Romantic Love

Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2022 at 8:40 PM

[Quote from Phillippe1](#)

"According to Lucretius, love is insatiable, accompanied by pain, heart-ache, bitterness, and other mental disturbances."

I don't know who wrote that, but even if it was David Sedley or someone else I highly respect I would say that is not a full picture of what Lucretius wrote.

Certainly romantic high-intensity love CAN be all of those things, but one of the first rules of Epicurean physics that crosses over into ethics is that there is no fate -- no "hard determinism" - and those results are not "inevitable." So the quote above "can" be a "part" of the picture of love, but it is by no means the full picture, and I don't believe Lucretius can fairly be read to say that it is.

(Forgot to start with -- Have you read Chapter four yourself?)

The final words of the chapter are (Humphries):

Finally,

The little woman does not have to be

A raving beauty; she can win your love,

Without the help of any gods, without

The darts of Cupids or of Venuses,

Simply by being decent, neat and clean,

A pleasant person to be living with.

That's about all it takes, and love depends

On habit quite as much as the wild ways

Of passion. Gently does it, as the rain

In time wears through the very hardest stone.

So one of the first observations I would make is that what is being discussed mainly is the intoxication of sexual passion. Intoxication of ANY kind can get someone into trouble, and

romantic love is a high-risk / high-reward activity that has to be "handled with care."

I could almost stop there because that's really the main point to be made, but there are all sorts of other observations, including those made in some threads here in the past. (If I have time I'll search through but I know we have forums dedicated to the topic.)

Now if you're talking about long term relationships, marriage, children, and all the rest, that's very different from the intoxication of sexual passion.

We know, for example, that in Epicurus' own will he provided that the daughter(s) (i forget if there was one or more) be married off to one of the members of the school. So we have that example that Epicurus himself was clearly not against all marriage.

The part of the Diogenes Laertius that attempts to summarize what the wise man would do regarding marriage appears to be corrupted, and the experts argue whether it's a general advice yes or no to get married. But the provision for Metrodorus' offspring to be married in my mind tells the tale, and even those who argue about that passage include in their translation that he's talking about marriage "according to circumstances."

And that's exactly what we would respect. There are no moral or fated absolutes in human life (with exception of death) and even dynamite can be handled with care and be very useful. If you're getting long-term attached solely for sex most everyone would agree that that's a bad idea - it just won't work over time.

But as Lucretius closed his chapter, you can have much deeper relationships that DO stand the test of time, and grow over time, if they are based on shared values, shared interests, shared goals, etc.

OK that's a start 😊