

General Comment On "One Size Doesn't Fit All" In Epicurean Art

Post by "Cassius" of January 11, 2019 at 6:23 PM

It seems to me that age/culture barriers largely explain different reactions to art. And that's a subset of the larger and wider fact that while we are all humans and there are definite limits to variation, we do have wide differences between individuals and groups in what we find pleasurable and painful. Even the same song or art can evoke different reactions in the same person depending on whether the things we associate it with change over time.

This is something that probably has to sink in over time, but that we probably ought to highlight. I am convinced that the core of Epicurean philosophy applies to everyone, everywhere, because the basic analysis of nature is correct. But within the scope of humanity there's a huge set of divisions culturally, and if we try to assert that our own variation of pleasure is going to fit everyone we're going to be very disappointed.

Something like this has come up before in discussion of "Eastern" vs "Western" approaches not only in music but in meditation and all sorts of "artistic" preferences. That's why when we started to update the "Epicurean music" playlist we worked on some time ago, it made sense to divide the playlist into styles so that each person can find his or her own preference.

I'm beginning to think that right up there with the jolts that people receive when they hear that Epicureans don't think there's life after death, or supernatural gods, or absolute virtues, we ought to include an item to the effect that "And everybody by Nature isn't going to want to live the same way, or follow the same politics, or economics, or music, or art..." With the emphasis on the point that none of these choices are "better" than any other, but that we all by nature have our own faculties of pleasure and pain, and Nature set us up to pursue them as WE see fit, and not as absolutists think we SHOULD see them.

Also - I don't want this to sound like I am taking a "libertarian" approach that every preference is totally the same. I think the reverse - I, like everyone who is honest, has strong preferences based on my sense of pain and pleasure. All I am saying is that when we rank our preferences we should be honest that our choices aren't sanctioned by gods or absolute ideals. We should all support what we find pleasurable, and avoid what we find painful, all the while being realistic about the reasons for our choices.