

Epicurus' Warning To the Young Man Who Was "Too Prone To The Pleasures Of Love"

Post by "Cassius" of February 11, 2019 at 9:39 AM

G: What about that one mention to the young fellow by epicurus' about sex? I think it went something like not to break any customs or hurt others and if you can do this then do it if not they don't. Do you know what I am referring to?

Cassius:

"You tell me that the stimulus of the flesh makes you too prone to the pleasures of love. Provided that you do not break the laws or good customs and do not distress any of your neighbors or do harm to your body or squander your pittance, you may indulge your inclination as you please. Yet it is impossible not to come up against one or other of these barriers, for the pleasures of love never profited a man and he is lucky if they do him no harm."

That one can be explained in large part, as Epicurus says, by presuming it was written to someone who was in intoxicated overdrive and taking risks that were not warranted by the potential gain. If you do approach sex prudently, then you can greatly reduce or eliminate those potential pains that Epicurus was warning about.

Now as to the last part about "never profited" I think we would want to scrutinize the translation and the context (which we probably don't have). "Never profited" cannot mean "never pleased" or "was never desirable" because we know that all pleasure is desirable from other Epicurean texts. Was he referring to intoxicated pursuit of "the pleasures of love" - maybe so and that would be consistent, if that is what the context shows. We know from other texts that Epicurus advised the daughter of Metrodorus to get married, and the texts also seem to say that he recommended marriage when appropriate. If he had advised against all marriage and all sex you can be sure we would have more clear texts on that point.

So I think this is one of those texts that has to be weighed against the rest, and if you do then you don't let this one overrule the rest, which are more consistent with the whole. Was it Epicurus or this text that appears to have a problem. My bet is that this text has a problem that would be explained if we had the original or more context or both.

And of course there is the lengthy discussion of all this in Lucretius.

In general Epicurus doesn't say that you can eliminate all risk or all pain, but you can't do that in the rest of life either. Just like in any pleasurable activity, you can reduce risks and pain to a manageable level if you act prudently in pursuing that pleasure. Some particular choices in pursuing pleasure cost more in pain than they are worth, but at the same time (1) pleasure is

the goal of living, and (2) even if the worst happens, pain that is intense doesn't last long, and pain that is less intense is manageable.

No one can make particular choices for you -- and it is impossible that they could, because if they could that would mean there is fate and/or some kind of mechanical determinism, which there is not in these issues.

You might find this prior discussion interesting <https://newepicurean.com/love-marriage-...e-modern-world/>