

# On freedom from distress = full pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of March 21, 2019 at 2:54 PM

***Thanks for the kind words Michele -***

That's a very important point and my view is just what Elayne said above. I think what you are getting out is that we all recoil at the realization that not everyone is capable of reaching the same level of success in living pleurably. We all immediately find the apparent inequity unfair, tragic, etc. and we look for an answer as to how the universe can make things right for everyone. I think this issue is much like death -- we all fight against it, and it tears us up when it happens.

But I think what Epicurus is saying is that reality cannot be escaped. The universe is NOT equitable, there is not a divine god or set of ideal forms that allows everyone to reach the same age, or the same standard of life. We can fight against that, we can do our best individually to help those less fortunate, but in the end the universe itself has no mechanism for providing equal levels of happiness for everyone.

Regardless, Epicurus' teachings are for \*everyone\* because they are based on the nature of all of us as human beings. All of us are born to live as pleurably as we can, whether we succeed in living to 100 and having huge families and great wealth, or whether we die immediately after childbirth. Nature is not a personal god and does not take personal interest in us - Nature has not designed the universe for us, and it is up to us (and to a significant extent, to unplanned circumstance) as to how we succeed.

But nevertheless the goal of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain is the only goal we all share.

If we are born in tragic circumstances and in great pain for which there is no relief, then the hard reality is that death will turn out to be the best option. But for most of us, in most situations, the reality is not nearly so bleak. We have to work hard for pleurable living, but for most of us it achievable.

But the key realization is that we all have different circumstances, and that we are all going to find ourselves pursuing pleasure and minimizing pain in different ways. Simplicity is generally (but not always) the best tool. NO tool is "always" the best, and that's why "virtue" in Epicurus is so flexible. No tool is an end in itself., the end is always the "feeling of pleasure" which is the only guide Nature gave us for what to pursue.

This is perfect for the line from book 6 of Lucretius I just quoted in the graphic:

*"For when he saw how little would suffice for necessary use, and by what small provisions life might be preserved; that Nature had prepared every thing ready to support mankind; that men abounded with wealth, and were loaded with honor and applause, and happy in their private concerns, in the good character of their children, and yet their minds were restless at home, complaining and lamenting the misery of their condition; he perceived the vessel itself (the mind) was the cause of the calamity, and by the corruption of that, every thing, though ever so good, that was poured into it was tainted: it was full of holes, and run out, and so could never by any means be filled; and whatever it received within, it infected with a stinking smell.*

*And therefore he purged the mind by true philosophy, and set bounds to our desires and our fears. He laid open to us the chief good, that point of happiness we all aim at, in what it consists, and showed us the direct way that leads to it, and puts us into the straight road to obtain it. He taught what misfortunes commonly attend human life, whether they flow from the laws of nature or from chance, whether from necessity or by accident; and by what means we are to oppose those evils, and strive against them. And he has fully proved that men torment themselves in vain, and are tossed about in a tempestuous ocean of cares to no purpose."*