

"Self Help Is Like a Vaccine" by Bryan Caplan

Post by "Cassius" of October 11, 2024 at 10:36 AM

[Quote from SillyApe](#)

On another note, sadly, I don't think Epicureanism is going to be as popular as Stoicism or Buddhism are nowadays, for the simple reason there's not much commercial appeal to it.

I think you're almost certainly right as a practical prediction, and substantially right that Buddhism and Stoicism appeal to a larger group of people, but I do think it is reasonable to work toward a future in which Epicureanism was as much "a player" as it was in the Roman world of 50 BC and thereabouts.

As I see it the number one hurdle to get across - with nothing else being close - is that of arguing the evidence supporting the view that Epicurus' "absence of pain" does not mean "absence of activity," but instead embraces *every* activity of human life that is not painful. The switch has to be made from thinking that Epicurus was preaching tranquility and asceticism as his goal to understanding it as it appears the ancients understood it: "Pleasure" includes every aspect of life that we find valuable, and given the shortness of life, every mental or physical activity that doesn't lead to "net pain" (when all consequences are considered) is in fact within the term "Pleasure." We even choose pain on a regular basis, when we expect the choice to eventually lead to net pleasure.

There is no reason whatsoever that every normal, vigorous, fundamentally healthy in mind and body, person of any age would not profit from realizing that there is no supernatural god, no absolute virtue, no ideal forms, nor any other supernatural or authoritative force to which we are required to conform, and that our happiness is predominantly in our own hands and within our own control.

Epicurean philosophy will start appealing to a much larger number people when we finally begin to push back against the Platonizing and Stoicizing and Supernaturalizing majority that dominates the world today. As long as the false focus on "tranquility" and "simplicity" and other aspects that are not ends in themselves remains the standard interpretation, Epicurean philosophy will remain in the shadows. However there is no "fate," and the fact that a vigorous Epicurean movement flourished in the ancient world shows that it is possible. What has happened once can happen again, and in fact since we know it is possible, we can infer that it has already happened and will happen in the future an infinite number of times.