

# "Self Help Is Like a Vaccine" by Bryan Caplan

Post by "SillyApe" of October 11, 2024 at 1:54 PM

[Cassius](#), I agree that we need to make clear that the Epicurean goal is pleasure, not some vague concept of tranquility/enlightenment. Every time someone searches for Epicureanism on the internet, they always end up being bombarded by someone telling them what Epicurus meant by "pleasure" was only "tranquility", which, for us who have gone a bit deeper into Epicurean studies, is clearly false(if it were true, Epicurus would have said that good and bad were decided by how much tranquility they bring and not by the sensory experience of pleasure/pain).

The big hurdle here is that, in a sense, Epicureanism "lost" a battle long ago. Christianity ruled the West for far too long. The way people see things is still inherently Christian, even if the religion itself is fading. Pleasure is still seen with a certain distrust. Even for those who don't necessarily hate pleasure, there's still the idea that you must balance pleasure with virtue as if they were opposites(while Epicurus made it clear that the virtues were a way to obtain pleasure). Perhaps that's why marketers were so successful in promoting Stoicism and Buddhism. In addition to their glamorization and foreignness which I mentioned earlier, these are still traditions that have a lot of alignment with Christian values. Stoics believed in an intelligence ruling the World(even if many "modern Stoics" don't like to think about it) and that the virtues were the end in themselves(going back to the Christian need of self-sacrifice and the need to improve oneself in order to resist temptation), while Buddhists preach about love, universal brotherhood, and offer the appeal of supernatural/transcendent forces(which many reject intellectually, but crave internally), all similar to Christian ideals.

I myself rejected Epicureanism the first time I discovered it. After leaving Christianity and studying everything from Stoicism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, finding a school of Philosophy that was materialist and hedonistic at its core, free from all superstition, felt almost wrong, even if deep down, the Epicurean claims made more sense to me than all the other philosophies and traditions I mentioned combined. I guess that, after centuries of being told that we matter to a higher power(or that there's something greater beyond what we can see), it is hard for someone to accept that they are just silly apes, roaming a World that does not care about them, with no intrinsic purpose and with nothing existing after death.

In the end, though, I am glad I left the supposed empty tomb and went in the direction of the Garden.