

"Self Help Is Like a Vaccine" by Bryan Caplan

Post by "Cassius" of October 11, 2024 at 3:32 PM

[SillyApe](#) You're certainly right that our current situation is going to be difficult to change, and any changes will be slow and come only with lots of effort. But we today have offsetting technologies and situations that have never before been available in human history, so there's good reason to be hopeful that progress can be made. Even the work we are doing here together would have been impossible much more than a decade ago. It's now so much easier to share information and group-source the research and other work that needs to be done that it's a total game-changer. There are dark clouds of censorship and opinion suppression already here and more on the horizon, but they don't dominate yet, and there is hope that we can stay ahead of that censorship through even better technology.

[Patrikios](#) It has been a great regret of mine that except for communications with Christos and Elli Pensa and perhaps a few others, we've never been able to establish much communication with the Epicurean activists in Greece. Christos certainly does excellent work and I hope over time that will change too. That said, there are definitely different opinions about Epicurus even among those of us who are "activists" on the topic. Christos is excellent in his medical practitioner approach as to the benefits of balance. From a personal point of view -- almost a "self-help" kind of view - I see appreciate the benefits of that approach. In addition to that, however, I see the goal of "balance" as being only one part of the benefit of Epicurean philosophy. Yes you definitely want "balance" as you live your life and respond to its challenges.

In addition, however, there are major philosophical issues that Epicurus was addressing that tend to get crowded out if one focuses only on "balance" or "tranquility" or any other single tool toward the ultimate goal. I suppose one might say that it is important to take a "balanced" approach even to balance, and to recognize that there are many other day to day decisions that must be made on which Epicurus had very many important things to say.

Many of these are very complicated philosophical problems require very uncomfortable decision-making given our current world circumstances. The more one thinks about it, the more the difficulty that faced Epicurus comes into focus. What single word, with what kind of definition, can possibly express adequately the complete meaning of "the highest good" or "the goal of life?" "Happiness" is far too ambiguous. It is claimed by far too many contradictory schools and viewpoints. Only "pleasure," which is tied tightly to the natural faculty of pleasure and pain, can do that job clearly. And even then, "pleasure" can fill that role only if it is adequately placed in the context of holding that life itself is the irreducible requirement of anything that is desirable. Only in the context of seeing that life-after-death and supernatural realms are equally fictitious, can we see that any kind of life at all, so long as it is not dominated by pain, is worthy of being considered a happy one. Of course we each have

opinions as to what *type* of pleasures suit us best, but it is "pleasure" that is the general category that makes life worth living. "Happiness" and many other words can be helpful, but only if they too are tightly tied to the natural feelings of pleasure and pain as Epicurus did. To cite what Torquatus says in *On Ends*, the wise man always has more reason for joy than for vexation.

I think if Epicurean philosophy is ever to break out of its current "backwater" in popular discussion, we'll need to address the whole spectrum of what Epicurus had to say. There are very many excellent minds in the modern Greek Epicurean world and I hope over time we can engage with more people around the world who are interested in this project. That will involve everyone including especially younger people who are not so easily taken in by thinking that "tranquility" is enough of a goal for their lives. On the other hand, neither will they embrace "Pleasure" unless it is explained to them the sweeping nature of the term in Epicurean philosophy. I am convinced, however, that the texts support ample support for the interpretations of "tranquility," "pleasure," "virtue" - and yes, even "gods," which Epicurus advocated. As [SillyApe](#) said, it's not going to be easy, and many texts have been lost, but what remains - combined with the same common-sense reasoning Epicurus exhibited - are more than enough to reconstruct what is needed.