

# Music Theory And Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of May 26, 2019 at 6:42 PM

After reading that article, here are my thoughts:

My reading of this is that the Epicureans were critical of the view that music theory could lead to the embodiment of "ideas" in particular musical forms. They weren't opposed to music itself, and indeed found it pleasurable, but they opposed the theory of trying to use music to imitate ideal forms and thereby embody "good" or "bad" in the music itself.

If that is correct, that would be parallel to the general Epicurean view against Platonic ideal forms in general. It seems clear that Epicurus campaigned against the Platonic view that ideal forms exist to be embodied in word formulas (concepts) and mathematical formulas (geometry and math), so it only makes sense that they would campaign against the attempt to embody ideal forms into musical formulas.

Surely the Epicureans did not campaign against music in general, and surely they did not argue that music cannot evoke pleasure or pain. So it seems most likely to me that they were not campaigning against music itself, but against the idea that music can embody something (ideal forms) that don't exist. Probably this kind of view also describes what Epicurus was saying about poetry. ("Only the wise man will be able to converse correctly about music and poetry, without however actually writing poems himself.") We can converse about how poetry and music make us feel without giving ourselves over to abstract theories that they embody something in themselves. Just like geometry and math can have highly productive practical uses without being considered to be mystical in themselves.

I'm interested to hear any and all opinions about this. No doubt this formulation of my initial reaction could be improved.