

Epicurus' teaching on marriage

Post by "Cassius" of August 26, 2019 at 8:25 AM

My view on that, Dubitator, is on several levels:

I first ask myself - Who is likely to understand Epicurus better? We today who have only fragments plus a huge assortment of negative commentary from opposing schools? Or ancients who had full access to texts and living, competent, Epicurean teachers in the direct line of the Epicurean school? To me that answer is clear.

I next ask myself - What is more consistent with the basic Epicurean view of the universe? If this life we have is the only one we will ever have, does it not make the most sense to live this life to the fullest? Would any sane person knowing that this is his only opportunity for pleasure willingly sacrifice himself to oppression when alternatives are available? To me that answer is clear too.

And I also ask myself - When there are alternative ways of interpreting the existing texts, why would one not interpret them consistently with the examples from the past and the Epicurean view of the universe? The passivist/quietist viewpoint can certainly be supported by taking some texts and elevating them outside of their original context. But the full context of all Epicurus' writings makes clear that "pleasure" and not quietism or even tranquillity is the goal. It is only by adopting a non-intuitive definition of "pleasure" that people can say with a straight face that Epicurus advocated tranquillity as the goal of life when he was also saying that ***"I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, of sex, of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form."***

Again citing back to your original question, I myself conclude that in an atomistic universe where there are no absolute guideposts but only contextual pleasure and pain, no position can be construed to be consistent with that starting point which attempts to assert ANY absolute guideline but looking to the ultimate result of the action and judging it in terms of pleasure and pain. That is what Epicurus said over and over and that is what makes sense based on his starting point.

And Epicurus also said over and over that [death is nothing to us](#) because it is the absence of feeling. The logical implication of that is that life is all about feeling, and that means feeling the rewards of pleasure and the negative aspects of pain. "Feeling" is something we all understand, just like all young animals do before they are perverted -- I am of course citing here from the opening of the Torquatus narrative of "On Ends." There is no way in my mind that feeling - based on the bedrock of sensation which is again stressed over and over - can be reasonably mutated into quietism / passivism / meditation-above-all-things.

And to close this particular post I would cite Torquatus' question that describes the ultimate life. This is not a life of withdrawal and resignation but one of active pleasure:

The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

I have collected cites that support this argument in this article: [The Full Cup / Fullness of Pleasure Model](#)