

# Reducing "Tranquilism" to its Absurd Conclusion

Post by "Cassius" of February 29, 2020 at 6:38 AM

The following article "[Crying Out In Despair](#)" came up in my google news feed, and I think it makes a point worth noting: the ultimate end of the "Tranquilism" approach to understanding Epicurus is absurdity.

The writer cites Catherine Wilson as advocating "organizing your sock drawer" as an example of finding meaning in life. Is this an unfair criticism of Wilson's position? I don't really think so, because this kind of "meaningfulness" is indeed what she seems to end up advocating, because she does not consistently and forthrightly advocate "pleasure" as the goal.

I haven't finished reading Wilson's book (and for this very reason - that I don't find many of her articulation of Epicurus' position on pleasure to be persuasive). Yet from the parts I have read I also think ironically that she is indeed one of the better Epicurean book-writers out there today, in that she does not fall into this tranquilism trap as far as do many others.

But when people are out there advocating inanities like "Christ is the antidote to depressing diagnoses," the response that is called for is not "tranquilism" and its logical conclusion of lowering your goals in life to the level of sock-drawer-organizing. This is biting criticism, and it is valid against the "tranquillist" position -- which a thorough reading of the texts establishes is *\*not\** what Epicurus advocated.

# Crying out in despair

Christ is the antidote to depressing diagnoses

by Marvin Olasky

Post Date: February 27, 2020 - Issue Date: March 14, 2020

---



Beware the Ides of March, ancient Romans used to say, but Catherine Wilson's *How to Be an Epicurean* (Basic, 2019) would have us, as we become ancient, beware every day. That's because one of her heroes is Lucretius, the ancient Roman materialist who considered the absence of pain and fear to be the greatest pleasure—and the old, facing both, would have “hearts ranked with anxiety.”

Epicureans advised us to think of death as “sleep,” but Wilson realizes the inadequacy of that: “If I believed I would not awaken tomorrow, my pleasure in today would be quickly forgotten.” Her supposed solution: “What makes life feel meaningful is doing what you are able to do to a certain standard that you set for yourself, caring for those whom you like and love and being cared for by them. You can enjoy a gratifying sense of accomplishment.”

Hmm. When Wilson tries to bring her abstractions to ground level, she becomes ludicrous: “The exercise of craftsmanship, whether it's putting together your lawnmower out of the box or organizing your sock drawer, brings order and beauty into the world.” That seems like a movie scene in which a character, slowly going insane, organizes and reorganizes her socks.