

Dance and it's place in Epicureanism?

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 7, 2022 at 7:12 PM

I found this article about ecstatic dance and wanted to share. This is something that I used to do a few years back. (Now with covid still happening, it only occurs on a very scaled back level).

My question is this: How does dance fit with Epicureanism, as it is something which creates a certain level of passion and excitement.

Do we know if dancing did occur at Epicurus' Garden? Or would the focus be more on the philosophy, so everyone focused on learning and discussion of philosophy? Or perhaps later Gardens in Roman times had dancing?

How would dancing fit with a modern Garden? (I know there are different types of social dance and this is just one modern type of dance).

Excerpt from article:

Quote

We all know what happens when a baby hears music.

If you haven't witnessed it firsthand, you've likely encountered a YouTube video (or, if you're in the majority, *many* videos) that captures a child's reflexive physical reaction to music. Viral videos show babies instinctively scrunching up their faces and nodding their heads to a dubstep track, or flailing their arms and legs from the confines of a car seat when the chorus kicks in on a pop song. (And, if YouTube observations aren't evidence enough, there's research like [this](#) 2010 study that found babies are predisposed to move to music.)

Turn some tunes on for a kid and the results are not only adorable, they are telling: humans are born to dance.

Yet, even though this innate need to move doesn't go away as we grow up, few of us adults let loose like our inner child would. When we do dance, it is often in a set way — in a dance class, for instance — or, if in more loose settings like the lusty dance floor of a nightclub, our movement can be filtered through the lenses of social norms and desires. Even as someone who relishes the opportunity to leave it all on the dance floor, my opportunities for truly liberated dance — the kind where you stop thinking and let your body go — are relegated to the dusty desert dance floors of Burning Man, the

occasional concert and solo dance parties in my living room. (Of which there are many.)

So what happened to us from tot-hood to adulthood that tampered with our freedom to groove?

[Want To Feel Ecstatic? Dance Like No One's Watching — Seriously](#)

Ecstatic dance—"a freestyle movement space where you can move to your inner rhythm."
reset.me

Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2022 at 7:29 PM

"Smooth motion" is something affirmatively associated with Epicurus somewhere in the texts, right [Don](#) ? (And others)

Post by "Matt" of January 7, 2022 at 7:53 PM

Somewhat related, I'm planning on picking up Tai Chi this year. I tried it a few years ago and liked the idea, but it takes lots of time to master. Something I don't have lots of...time. It's also very different from the Taekwondo I was used to in my teens and 20's. But it's still technically a martial art and one that would fit my more philosophical side.

Post by "Don" of January 7, 2022 at 8:25 PM

LII. Friendship goes dancing round the world proclaiming to us all to awake to the praises of a happy life.

Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2022 at 8:32 PM

I know I have seen something specific about "smooth motion" - I will look further.

Post by “Don” of January 7, 2022 at 8:47 PM

Is this it?

67. I do not think I could conceive of the good without the joys of taste, of sex, of hearing, and without the pleasing motions caused by the sight of bodies and forms.

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔγωγε ἔχω τί νοήσω τὰγαθὸν ἀφαιρῶν μὲν τὰς διὰ χυλῶν ἡδονάς, ἀφαιρῶν δὲ τὰς δι' ἀφροδισίων, ἀφαιρῶν δὲ τὰς δι' ἀκροαμάτων, ἀφαιρῶν δὲ καὶ τὰς διὰ μορφῆς κατ' ὄψιν [those by way of shapes and along with vision] ἡδείας κινήσεις [of pleasing motions].

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 8, 2022 at 4:47 AM

Hm, I'm not sure that Epicurus would necessarily approve "formal" dancing, like waltzer. I think that for him, it would very strongly depend on the context. If you're in a group of people you like, and the music is more or less good- great, enjoy it. There's nothing advising against such an event.

But there are some formal settings where the aspect of pleasure isn't the main goal of the event, it might be wise to consider if you really want to attend. If you've to dance with a person you don't really like, to a time where you would love to be at home and watch Netflix, then the whole event can be really unpleasurable, because you simply want to leave.

Dancing "with"/"to" yourself, in the contrary, is most certainly pleasurable, because you can select your own music, dancing style etc. I think that would fall under the category of "natural", but "non-necessary", and thus- when employed in moderation-, it can make your life a whole lot pleasurable.

So go for it, I guess.

Post by “Cassius” of January 8, 2022 at 6:23 AM

i see that googling brings up a lot of references to Aristippus and the Cyreniacs, such as this one:

<https://epicureanism.wordpress.com/category/pleasure/>

It is possible i may be confusing the two, but I really thought that I had read commentators say that Epicurus had endorsed this notion, and that either in Herodotus and/or Lucretius there was evidence of pleasure being referenced as atoms moving with smoothness vs roughness.

I better back off for the moment as I cannot confirm, but I suspect we'll eventually find something.

Post by “Matt” of January 8, 2022 at 7:08 AM

I get the sense ecstatic dancing (from the video I watched) is akin to many practices that are “personal” preferences that bring about pleasure. Like doing yoga, meditation, a sport etc.

I don't know if historical Epicureans danced regularly, but since dance is a huge part of many cultural gatherings, I can't imagine it wouldn't have been an accepted

practice. But especially now, doing what gives you pleasure is 100% an accepted practice, so I'd say...dance on.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 8, 2022 at 10:41 AM

Perhaps [Cassius](#) the phrase "agreeable motion"?...which just last night found, because I was reading about creating Epicurean outlines: [Thomas Jefferson's Epicurean Outline](#)

And then my mind starting thinking about how someone who enjoys both pleasure and reason, might not very often find themselves in the midst of the ecstatic dance crowd (What would Thomas Jefferson say about ecstatic dance, if he time-traveled and observed it?)

And then it came to me...

Epicureans would more often than not, would dance with their eyes fully open!

So much of group ecstatic dance is done with the eyes closed, however I very rarely felt the need to do so when I danced. Also in my Buddhist meditation - eyes open, not closed.

Because Epicureans fully accept the world, fully inhabit the pleasure of life, take responsibility for personally navigating through pleasure and pain (responsible action) then there is an enjoyment of the experience of life...and so we enjoy dancing with our eyes wide open.

Post by “Cassius” of January 8, 2022 at 12:46 PM

Yes I agree with all your points Kalosyni. I probably am remembering that clip from Jefferson, but I am also thinking that he himself probably picked it up somewhere, perhaps in Cicero or Diogenes Laertius. It's pretty clear that the term appears in a Cyreniac context, and probably the main question is whether there is any evidence that Epicurus or the Epicureans wrote that they agreed with it. I haven't had time to search in Lucretius - let me make a quick check....

Nothing direct so far, but:

Book 2

[408] Lastly, all things good or bad to the senses in their touch fight thus with one another, because they are built up of bodies of different shape; lest by chance you may think that the harsh shuddering sound of the squeaking saw is made of particles as smooth as are the melodies of music which players awake, shaping the notes as their fingers move nimbly over the strings; nor again, must you think that first-beginnings of like shape pierce into men's nostrils, when noisome carcasses are roasting, and when the stage is freshly sprinkled with Cilician saffron, and the altar hard by is breathing the scent of Arabian incense; nor must you suppose that the pleasant colours of things, which can feed our eyes, are made of seeds like those which prick the pupil and constrain us to tears, or look dreadful and loathly in their hideous aspect.

Book 5

[1379] But imitating with the mouth the liquid notes of birds came long before men were able to sing in melody right through smooth songs and please the ear. And the whistling of the zephyr through the hollows of reeds first taught the men of the countryside to breathe into hollowed hemlock-stalks. Then little by little they learned the sweet lament, which the pipe pours forth, stopped by the players' fingers, the pipe invented amid the pathless woods and forests and glades, among the desolate haunts of shepherds, and the divine places of their rest.