

Epicureanism and Romantic Love

Post by “Philliped1” of June 27, 2022 at 6:52 PM

found this...

"According to Lucretius, **love is insatiable, accompanied by pain, heart-ache, bitterness, and other mental disturbances.**"

As a 45 year old male that has been in several long term relationships in my life lasting 4-7 years each...

I dont see the point anymore.

I've been single for 4 years now, I have more peace of mind than I've ever had in my life, zero drama, a wonderful daughter that i enjoy spending time with, and I'm crushing my goals every year.

I do think about sex when i see beautiful women in public and love the idea of having more friends.... but i have zero desire to be committed to anyone romantically.

And despite my contentment im reminded by society and friends and family frequently that my situation is clearly not normal.

So naturally i second guess if im missing out on something or what.

I still havnt figured out....if i did have more female friends and start having sex again what that would even LOOK like...the dynamic etc.

Would love to hear feedback from anyone.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this...I hope all of you are having a wonderful day.

Peace n love

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 27, 2022 at 8:39 PM

Hi Phillip1 and welcome to the forum. 😊

You wrote that you have peace of mind now, but yet friends, family, and society seem to suggest that singleness isn't "normal", and then this causes you to question if you are missing out on something -- even though in the past you were in several long-term relationships.

When it comes to either being single or in a relationship, I think Epicureanism would say that it would simply be a matter of personal preference. If you are happier being single than that sounds great, and maybe it is more about knowing how to handle what other people's perspectives or opinions are about being in a relationship?

Relationships can be difficult at times, and can take effort, but they should bring more pleasure than pain, and when too much pain arises then there are underlying causes which could be worked through with the help of a therapist. From the time we are born, we all learn about love from our parents and how they interacted with us (the mother-child bond) and with each other ([read this about attachment theory](#)).

You might find this very long thread on romantic love of interest:

Post

[**An Epicurean Understanding of Valentine's Day: Love, Romance, and Free-will**](#)

Valentine's Day is one month away...how do we make sense of romance and love within the "Epicurean worldview". Is romantic love in direct opposition of the wisdom of free-will?

[...]

Diogenes Laertius :

Book 10, Sections 84-154

"They do not think that the wise man will ever be in love, nor that he will be anxious about his burial, nor that love is a passion inspired by the gods, as Diogenes says in his twelfth book. They also assert that he will be indifferent to the study of oratory. Intercourse,...



Kalosyni

January 16, 2022 at 1:19 AM

Post by "Cassius" of June 27, 2022 at 8:40 PM

[Quote from Phillip1](#)

"According to Lucretius, love is insatiable, accompanied by pain, heart-ache, bitterness, and other mental disturbances."

I don't know who wrote that, but even if it was David Sedley or someone else I highly respect I would say that is not a full picture of what Lucretius wrote.

Certainly romantic high-intensity love CAN be all of those things, but one of the first rules of Epicurean physics that crosses over into ethics is that there is no fate -- no "hard determinism" - and those results are not "inevitable." So the quote above "can" be a "part" of the picture of love, but it is by no means the full picture, and I don't believe Lucretius can fairly be read to say that it is.

(Forgot to start with -- Have you read Chapter four yourself?)

The final words of the chapter are (Humphries):

Finally,

The little woman does not have to be

A raving beauty; she can win your love,

Without the help of any gods, without

The darts of Cupids or of Venuses,

Simply by being decent, neat and clean,

A pleasant person to be living with.

That's about all it takes, and love depends

On habit quite as much as the wild ways

Of passion. Gently does it, as the rain

In time wears through the very hardest stone.

So one of the first observations I would make is that what is being discussed mainly is the intoxication of sexual passion. Intoxication of ANY kind can get someone into trouble, and romantic love is a high-risk / high-reward activity that has to be "handled with care."

I could almost stop there because that's really the main point to be made, but there are all sorts of other observations, including those made in some threads here in the past. (If I have time I'll search through but I know we have forums dedicated to the topic.)

Now if you're talking about long term relationships, marriage, children, and all the rest, that's very different from the intoxication of sexual passion.

We know, for example, that in Epicurus' own will he provided that the daughter(s) (i forget if there was one or more) be married off to one of the members of the school. So we have that example that Epicurus himself was clearly not against all marriage.

The part of the Diogenes Laertius that attempts to summarize what the wise man would do regarding marriage appears to be corrupted, and the experts argue whether it's a general advice yes or no to get married. But the provision for Metrodorus' offspring to be married in my mind tells the tale, and even those who argue about that passage include in their translation that he's talking about marriage "according to circumstances."

And that's exactly what we would respect. There are no moral or fated absolutes in human life (with exception of death) and even dynamite can be handled with care and be very useful. If you're getting long-term attached solely for sex most everyone would agree that that's a bad idea - it just won't work over time.

But as Lucretius closed his chapter, you can have much deeper relationships that DO stand the test of time, and grow over time, if they are based on shared values, shared interests, shared goals, etc.

OK that's a start 😊

Post by “Cassius” of June 27, 2022 at 8:41 PM

Looks like Kalosyni and I crossposted, but I am glad to say that after reading her post I agree it is well stated and thank her for finding the thread I didn't have time to find.

Post by “Philliped1” of June 27, 2022 at 8:50 PM

You guys are awesome. Thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to share such a valuable perspective and knowledge.

Great points.

I plan on reading this thread several times.

"The little woman does not have to be

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This really got me thinking as well...what a delightful breath of fresh air this sounds like....who knows, maybe one day. 😊

Post by "Matt" of June 29, 2022 at 7:48 PM

Hi friends!

Im just checking in.

I saw this topic and I'd love to chat about it.

I'll be back a little later to comment. Since this subject has been significant in my life lately.

☐☐

Post by “Cassius” of June 29, 2022 at 7:58 PM

Great and I will be looking forward to it.

Post by “Matt” of June 29, 2022 at 8:40 PM

I’ve made some changes in my life recently that are directly related to this...

I’m 37, I was married for 10 years...I have 2 daughters.

In my case in my marriage the passion has dissipated significantly and I was “dissatisfied” over the course of about 5 years. This feeling led to a feeling of depression.

So that relationship ended...

And this is what I’ve learned. People have wildly varying ranges of sexual desire...it has to do with genetics, age and hormones. The problem is that we often aren’t honest about what we want when meeting someone, we don’t communicate well. This was especially true in my 20’s.

But what I’ve learned now is that honesty is in fact the best policy when it comes to a sexual relationship....one you verify that the other individual is on the same page as you with their drive matching yours, it’s critical to let them know exactly what you desire in this relationship so as to manage expectations. I think unmanaged expectations are the main source of dissatisfaction in a sexual relationship...and communication is key.

To reach the best conclusion, we must always manage expectations by communicating.

And I’ll say I have spread the gospel of Epicurus far and wide these days.

Post by “Cassius” of June 29, 2022 at 11:23 PM

[Quote from Matt](#)

think unmanaged expectations are the main source of dissatisfaction in a sexual relationship...and communication is key

Probably that applies to life in general and maybe that is in fact a huge part of Epicurus - managing expectations of what is possible and what is not.

Post by “Joshua” of June 30, 2022 at 9:55 AM

Probably my approach to this question would be twofold. The first point I would like to see articulated is that Epicurus' opinions about sex and romance—whatever they turn out to be—are just that; opinions. I'm not very likely to consult a dead philosopher *at all* on these matters, they being so intimate and so personal, and I am *especially* uninterested in giving my ear to any High Priest of Epicureanism on what I should do, or what I am *allowed* to do when it comes to interpersonal relationships.

The second point is this; apart from the physicality of the thing itself, nearly everything about sex and about romance has changed wildly since the 3rd century BC. "Chaste"—I detest the word *pure* when applied to people—but "chaste" women tethered to their looms, and shut away in an inner room, is no longer the order of the day. Richard Nixon famously said about economics that "we are all Keynesians now". Well, in the 21st century we are, in the English-speaking world of my experience, nearly all Epicureans when it comes to sex. *Purity* and *sin*, thank heavens or culture, are on the outs, and *choice* and *avoidance* are the new watchwords.

My parents have an average of 8 or 9 siblings. Them and their siblings have an average of two or 3 children. This fact tells a story that the homilies of their parish priests do *not* tell. They will continue to say one thing, but secular culture and law has allowed them to choose quite another.

So, if you are lucky enough now that no one has the power to coerce you—what will *you* choose? That is, in my view, the only question that means anything.

Post by “Cassius” of June 30, 2022 at 10:20 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

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personal, and I am especially uninterested in giving my ear to any High Priest of Epicureanism on what I should do, or what I am allowed to do when it comes to interpersonal relationships.

I agree with that too with this different wording:

Epicurus was a "philosopher." He was not a "Life Coach" or a "Sex Therapist" or a "Psychologist," or a "Psychiatrist" except as we choose to think about applying his general rules to our own specific cases.

All we really know about Epicurus' personal life is that he seemed to spend most of his time in studying nature and engaging in philosophical discussions (battles) over conflicting philosophical ideas. We don't know his specific thoughts on a wide variety of specific situations.

Yes his general philosophical deductions do have applications to specifics, but only in a general way. The thrust of his work was at high levels like:

- There are no supernatural gods or life after death so live like you only live once.
- Pleasure and Pain as feels are in a general sense the real guides to life, not virtue or divinities.
- Think about all the results of your choices, long and short term, and make your decisions so as to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.
- Actions that have a high risk of painful results need to be engaged in very carefully, if you choose to engage in them at all.

I don't think Epicurus meant to be interpreted as being any more specific toward specific people than general "rules of thumb" like that. And it wouldn't make sense for him to try to, because the whole thrust of his worldview is that there is no fate and no hard determinism so everyone has to deal with their own circumstances as best they can.

Even the extended treatment of romantic love in Book Four of Lucretius is really almost just a series of semi-amusing anecdotes which try to impress among people who are intoxicated to be especially careful - not a general rule of "do this" or "don't do that" -- heck the experts can't even agree if he had a general rule for or against marriage itself, and the best unwinding of that always seems to come down to "it depends."

So I see Epicurus' general advice to be "Be Careful."

He's providing the starting point, but he's NOT telling us to take that info and go sit in a cave. He tells us also to gather friends and talk about things and apply the general rules to life, and that's the kind of thing we can do by looking at modern and specific contexts and help each other analyze things and work together as friends to apply the general rules to the specific problems.

Post by “Pacatus” of July 18, 2022 at 4:42 PM

I have been married twice. The first was based on manipulation and deceit -- which, because of whatever blindness on my part (maybe unexamined passion), it took me years and years to recognize. That realization was deeply painful and disturbing: I sought counseling/therapy; and eventually ended the marriage (which action was met with great acrimony and the loss of not a few "friends" -- there were times when I could not rationally function).

My second marriage started with deep and growing friendship: we were friends -- and eventually best friends -- before any romantic intimacy. Our marriage has lasted 27 years, and now we grow old together, still as best friends.

I'm **not** holding that up as a model over the single life. We are all different. There are many socially-prominent and culturally-promulgated rules and notions that simply do not fit who I am. All I am trying to say is that -- even for an introvert like me -- Epicurus was, to my mind, right about friendship.