

Episode 210 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 17 - Self-Approval As Pleasure

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Welcome to Episode 210 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we continue our discussion of Book Two of Cicero's On Ends, which is largely devoted Cicero's attack on Epicurean Philosophy. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#). Check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

This week we move into Section XIX:

XIX. Apply the same remarks to self-restraint or temperance, by which I mean a government of the desires which pays allegiance to reason. Well then, supposing a man to yield to vice, in the absence of witnesses, would he shew sufficient regard for modesty, or is there something which is in itself abominable, though attended by no disgrace? What? Do brave men go to battle and pour out their blood for their country, because they have gone through the arithmetic of pleasures, or because they are carried away by a certain enthusiasm and tide of feeling? Pray do you think, Torquatus, that old Imperiosus, if he were listening to our talk, would find greater pleasure in giving ear to your speech about himself, or to mine, in which I stated that he had done nothing from regard for himself, but everything in the interest of the commonwealth; while on the contrary you said he had done nothing but what he did out of regard to himself? If more- over you had further chosen to make the matter clear, and to state your view more plainly, that he acted entirely with an eye to pleasure, how do you think he would have endured it?

Be it so; suppose, if you like, that Torquatus acted for the sake of his own interests (I would rather use this word than pleasures, particularly in relation to so great a man); did his colleague Publius Decius, who was the first of his family to achieve the consulship, think anything of his own pleasures, when he had offered himself up, and was rushing into the midst of the Latin line, with his horse at full gallop? Where did he expect to catch his pleasure or when, knowing

that he must instantly die, and seeking his death with more burning zeal than Epicurus thinks should be given to the search for pleasure? And if this exploit of his had not been justly applauded, never would his son have emulated it in his fourth consulship, nor would this man's son again have died on the field of battle, while conducting as consul the war with Pyrrhus, thus offering himself for his country as a third sacrifice from the same family in unbroken succession. I refrain from further instances. The Greeks have few in this class, Leonidas, Epaminondas, some three or four others ; if I begin to gather up our own examples, I shall indeed compel pleasure to surrender herself to virtue as her prisoner, but the day will not be long enough for me, and just as Aulus Varius, who was looked upon as a rather severe judge, used to say to his assessor, when witnesses had been examined, and still others were being summoned: Either we have got enough witnesses or I do not know what is enough, so I think I have supplied enough witnesses. Why, was it pleasure that led you yourself, a most worthy representative of your ancestors, while quite young, to rob Publius Sulla of the consulship? And when you had conferred this office on that staunchest of gentlemen, your father, what a noble consul he was, and what a noble citizen after his consulship, as always! And it was by his advice that I myself carried out a policy which had regard to the general interest rather than my own.

But how excellently you seemed to me to speak, when you set before us on the one side a man crowned with most numerous and most intense pleasures, free from all pain, either actual or impending, and on the other side one racked with most grievous torments over his whole frame, with no pleasure, either attendant or prospective, and then asked who could be more wretched than the latter man or more happy than the former, and thence inferred that pain is the paramount evil, and pleasure the paramount good! XX. There was a man of Lanuvium, Lucius Thorius Balbus, whom you cannot remember; he lived in such fashion that no pleasure could be discovered, however rare, in which he did not revel. Not only was he a zealot for pleasures, but he possessed ability and resource in this line of life ; and he was so devoid of superstition, that he cared nothing for those sacrifices and shrines which are so very numerous in his native place, and so free from fear in face of death, that he died for his country on the field of battle. The bounds to his passions were prescribed not by the classification of Epicurus, but by his own sense of repletion. Yet he took care of his health, he availed himself of such exercise as might send him thirsty and hungry to dinner, and of such food as was at once pleasantest and easiest to digest, and of wine sufficient to give pleasure without doing harm. He gave heed to those other matters in the absence of which Epicurus says he fails to understand what goad means. All pain kept aloof; but if it had come, he would have endured it without weakness, though he would have resorted to physicians rather than philosophers. He had an admirable complexion, perfect health, extreme popularity, his life in fact was replete with all the divers forms of pleasure. This is the man you pronounce happy; at least your system compels you to it; but I have hardly the courage to say who it is that I prefer to him; virtue herself shall speak for me, and shall without hesitation prefer to your man of happiness her Marcus Regulus; and virtue proclaims that when he had returned from his own country to Carthage of his own choice and under no compulsion but that of his honour, which he had pledged to the enemy, he was happier in the very hour at which he was tortured by want of sleep and hunger, than Thorius when drinking on his bed of roses. He had conducted important

wars, had been twice elected consul, had enjoyed a triumph, though he did not regard his previous exploits as so important or so splendid as his last sacrifice, which he had taken upon him from motives of honour and consistency: a sacrifice that seems pitiable to us when we hear of it, but was pleasurable to him while he endured it. In truth, happy men are not always in a state of cheerfulness or boisterousness, or mirth, or jesting, which things accompany light characters, but oftentimes even in stern mood are made happy by their staunchness and endurance. When Lucretia was violated by the king's son, she called her fellow-countrymen to witness and cut short her life by her own hand. The indignation felt at this by the Roman people, with Brutus for their leader and adviser, gave freedom to the community, and in remembrance of the lady both her husband and her father were elected consuls in the first year. Lucius Verginius, a poor man and sprung from the people, in the sixtieth year after freedom had been won, slew his maiden daughter with his own hand rather than let her be sacrificed to the lust of Appius Claudius, who then held supreme authority.

Sequence of Arguments In Book Two

1. Cicero alleges that Torquatus does not know what pleasure means. "As it is, however, I allege that Epicurus himself is in the dark about it and uncertain in his idea of it, and that the very man who often asserts that the meaning which our terms denote ought to be accurately represented, sometimes does not see what this term pleasure indicates, I mean what the thing is which is denoted by the term." (End of Section II)
2. No one else talks about Pleasure this way
3. Epicurus is failing to be clear
4. No only do the words differ, but the THINGS differ - freedom from pain is not pleasure
5. In holding that pleasure is the supreme good Epicurus says that ANY kinds of pleasures are desirable, even depraved ones, if they banish pain, which is what he means by evil (Section VII)
6. Epicurus calls a profligate life desirable, and that is despicable. No reputable man speaks that way.
7. How can pleasure be the supreme good, when we can't even say that pleasure is the goal of a dinner? (IX)
8. The natural and necessary distinction is awkwardly worded.
9. Even Epicurus says that pleasure is not the goal, because what he really says is the goal is "absence of pain" (X)
10. Epicurus' defense of pleasure based on looking at babies and animals makes no sense because they are not authorities on the subject.
11. It may be difficult to determine whether pleasure is a primary endowment of man, but certainly there are others that are more important, such as man's intellectual ability, and the virtues.
12. The senses cannot decide as to the goal because they have no jurisdiction to answer that question.

13. If we do refute the claim that pleasure is the supreme good we must turn our backs upon virtue. (XIV)
14. The moral is that which, even if it had no utility, would be desired for its own qualities, regardless of its advantages. (XIV-45)
15. The classical virtues are seen to be lovely and beautiful in themselves.

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