

Episode 313 - TD40 - Diagnosing When Words Are Empty Of Meaning

Post by "Cassius" of December 20, 2025 at 12:26 PM

Welcome to Episode 313 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 we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

We are closing in on the end of those portions of Tusculan Disputations that are most relevant to Epicurean philosophy today, so we'll pick up this week at [Section 40 of Part 5](#).

Last week one of the points made last week was that while a lot of philosophy can be viewed by non-specialists as a word game, there are deep differences in the foundations of the different schools that lead to dramatically different conclusions about how to live. The words can begin to blur together, and the definition-games can become tedious, but it is extremely important to know what is behind the analysis of any viewpoint in order to judge the ultimate result.

This issue of whether virtue is the only good, or whether virtue is sufficient for happiness, has tremendous practical implications. Who or what gets to decide what "good" is? Who or what gets to decide what "virtue" is? Who or what gets to decide what "happiness" is? Behind the Stoic / Platonic / non-Epicurean viewpoint is this idea that there are supernatural gods, or supernatural ideal forms, to which we should look to tell us what to do rather than the sense of pleasure and pain which Nature gives to each of us individually. The choice of school you choose to follow is therefore going to have tremendous implications on your life individually, socially, religiously, politically, and in probably every way imaginable.

Let's also in this context go back and quote the way Cicero quotes Epicurus as to the sorites syllogism we used last night and the full context of it.

Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 3.41—42 (Usener 67, 69)

[Epicurus On The End] 'For my part I cannot conceive of anything as the good if I remove the pleasures perceived by means of taste and sex and listening to music, and the pleasant motions felt by the eyes through beautiful sights, or any other pleasures which some sensation generates in a man as a whole. Certainly it is impossible to say that mental delight is the only good. For a delighted mind, as I understand it, consists in the expectation of all the things I just mentioned - to be of a nature able to acquire them without pain... ' A little later he adds: 'I have often asked men who were called wise what they could retain as the content of goods if they

removed those things, unless they wanted to pour out empty words. I could learn nothing from them; and if they want to babble on about virtues and wisdoms, they will be speaking of nothing except the way in which those pleasures I mentioned are produced.' (Long & Sedley - Hellenistic Philosophers)

We might want to repeat the "color gradient chart" to illustrate this.

When you playing with these Platonists and Stoics you're playing word games in which the dice are loaded and the games are stacked against you as much as any casino in Los Vegas or Atlantic City.

At some point we need to compare this to Rand's (Aristotle's) A = A A think is itself.

And let's also cite what Joshua mentioned from Lorenzo Valla:

Post

[RE: Happy Twentieth of December 2025!](#)

Here is that passage from [Lorenzo Valla's *De Voluptate*](#):

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Joshua

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