

Episode 211 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 18 - Battle Of The Images

Post by “Cassius” of January 20, 2024 at 1:25 PM

Welcome to Episode 211 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 XXI:

XXI. You must either blame these examples, Torquatus, or must abandon your advocacy of pleasure. But what kind of advocacy is this, or what sort of case can you make out for pleasure, which will never be able to call witnesses either to fact or to character from among men of distinction? While we are wont to summon as our witnesses from the records of the past men whose whole life was spent in noble exertion, who would never be able to listen to the name of pleasure, on the other hand in your debates history is silent. I have never heard that in any discussion carried on by Epicurus the names of Lycurgus, Solon, Miltiades, Themistocles, Epaminondas were mentioned, men who are ever on the lips of all the other philosophers. Now however, seeing that we Romans also have begun to handle these subjects, what fine and great men will Atticus produce for us from his stores! Is it not better to say something of these men than to talk through such ponderous tomes about Themista? Let us allow such things to be characteristic of Greeks; though it is from them that we derive philosophy and all liberal arts; but still there are things which are not permitted to us, though permitted to them.

The Stoics are at war with the Peripatetics. The one school declares that there is nothing good but what is moral; the other that it assigns the highest, aye, infinitely the highest value to morality, but that nevertheless there are some good things connected with our bodies and also

some external to us. What a moral debate, what a noble disagreement! In truth, the whole struggle concerns the prestige of virtue. But whenever you discuss with your fellow disciples, you must listen to much that concerns the impure pleasures, of which Epicurus very often speaks. Believe me, then, Torquatus, you cannot maintain your doctrines, if you once gain a clear view of your own nature and your own thoughts and inclinations; you will blush, I say, for that picture which Cleanthes used to paint, certainly very neatly, in his conversation. He bade his audience imagine to themselves pleasure painted in a picture as sitting on a throne, with most lovely raiment and queenly apparel; the virtues near her as her handmaidens, with no other employment, and no thought of other duty, than to wait upon pleasure, and merely to whisper in her ear (if only painting could convey such meaning) to guard against doing anything heedlessly, which might wound men's feelings, or anything from which some pain might spring. We virtues, indeed, were born to be your thralls; we have no other function.

XXII. Oh, but Epicurus says (this indeed is your strong point) that no one can live agreeably who does not live morally. As though I gave any heed to what he affirms or denies! The question I ask is, what statement is consistent for a man to make, who builds his highest good upon pleasure. What do you allege to shew that Thorius, that Hirrius, that Postumius, and the master of all these men, Orata, did not live very agreeable lives? He himself, as I mentioned already, asserts that the life of sybarites is not worthy of blame, unless they are utterly foolish, that is, unless they are subject to passion and fear. And when he proffers a remedy for both these conditions, he proffers immunity to sybaritism. For if these two conditions are removed, he says that he finds nothing to blame in the life of profligates. You cannot therefore, while guiding all actions by pleasure, either defend or maintain virtue. For a man who refrains from injustice only to avoid evil must not be considered a good and just man; you know of course the saying, no one is righteous, whose righteousness...; well, never suppose that any saying is truer.

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.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58476128>

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2024 at 5:01 PM

I have to apologize to everyone that this episode is not out yet, because it contains I think some interesting material about a specific argument made by Cleanthes against pleasure on which I was hoping to get some input. Cleanthes had apparently constructed a mental image of a painting in which pleasure was in the center on a throne, and the virtues were her handmaidens waiting on her, and this was supposed to inspire revulsion among those who valued virtue. I think there are probably some very interesting aspects of this to discuss further, including perhaps some artwork over the intervening centuries putting into action Cleanthes' image, but we'll discuss that over time as we learn more about whether there is anything else to discuss. Here's the citation from XX! of Book 2:

Believe me, then, Torquatus, you cannot maintain your doctrines, if you once gain a clear view of your own nature and your own thoughts and inclinations; you will blush, I say, for that picture which Cleanthes used to paint, certainly very neatly, in his conversation. He bade his audience imagine to themselves pleasure painted in a picture as sitting on a throne, with most lovely raiment and queenly apparel; the virtues near her as her handmaidens, with no other

employment, and no thought of other duty, than to wait upon pleasure, and merely to whisper in her ear (if only painting could convey such meaning) to guard against doing anything heedlessly, which might wound men's feelings, or anything from which some pain might spring. We virtues, indeed, were born to be your thralls; we have no other function.

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2024 at 7:00 PM

Episode 211 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we take up Cicero's criticism of the Epicurean image of the best life, and observe his contrasting image - that of Cleanthes and the allegedly outrageous image of the virtues being the handmaidens to Pleasure.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58476128>

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2024 at 6:33 AM

I thought I had seen a Renaissance or Medieval interpretation of Cleanthes' imaginary painting somewhere, but so far I cannot find one. I wonder if someone reading this who is good with using the new AI drawing mechanisms would be interested in seeing what they could do to create one. I am sure that there are many variations which could be used to make useful representations, but I am specifically thinking of at least two - one to illustrate Cleanthes' version for discussion purposes, and one to illustrate an Epicurean alternative of the same scene.

One - A version to illustrate exactly what Cicero describes: "that picture which Cleanthes was in the habit of drawing with such accuracy in his description. He used to desire those who came to him as his pupils, to think of Pleasure painted in a picture, clad in beautiful robes, with royal ornaments, and sitting on a throne. He represented all the Virtues [edit: presumably Wisdom, Temperance, Courage, Justice - perhaps Friendship also) around her, as her handmaidens, doing nothing else, and thinking nothing else their duty, but to minister to Pleasure, and only just to whisper in her ear (if, indeed, that could be made intelligible in a picture) a warning to be on her guard to do nothing imprudent, nothing to offend the minds of men, nothing from which any pain could ensue. We, indeed, they would say, we Virtues are only born to act as your slaves; we have no other business."

Two - I suspect version one as described by Cleanthes would have followed Cicero's insistence on seeing Pleasure as "sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll" by portraying Pleasure, though clad beautifully, with sort of a "harsh" face to emphasize that "sensuous" side of Pleasure. But if an Epicurean were conveying the scene in its true aspect, the view of Pleasure on the throne would have her portrayed fully in a more "noble" look to convey *all* the aspects of Epicurean pleasure, not only the beauty of sensuousness but also the elegance and strength and beauty that comes from embodying wisdom and temperance and courage and justice in a way properly understood as consistent with and a part of pleasure.

So for Two we would need a different version to contrast with that of Cleanthes. We would need (if something like this works as an AI instruction: "A picture of a young and beautiful and strong queen, [in classic Greco-Roman style analogous perhaps to Arwen in Lord of the Rings], smiling and are surrounded by cherubic angels who look to be her happy subjects labeled wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and friendship, all conveying a look of harmonious happiness and benevolence.

I haven't studied enough of the AI world to know how to do this yet but perhaps others could take a shot at it?

Post by "Kalosyni" of January 28, 2024 at 8:32 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

and one to illustrate an Epicurean alternative of the same scene.

I made this last year, which by using the bride as representative of pleasure and the bridesmaids as attendants gives it a more modern twist which is likely slightly different than what [Cassius](#) was envisioning.

Pleasure attended by the virtues

Pleasure:

That which is agreeable and pleasant, and unaccompanied by pain or disturbance



Virtues:

Wisdom
Temperance
Justice
Courage
Friendship

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2024 at 8:45 AM

Yes, we started talking about this last year and that was a good start. Now I think we are much further along in understanding the tremendously impactful philosophical value of these images that Cicero has preserved for us. We might work more dramatized versions of:

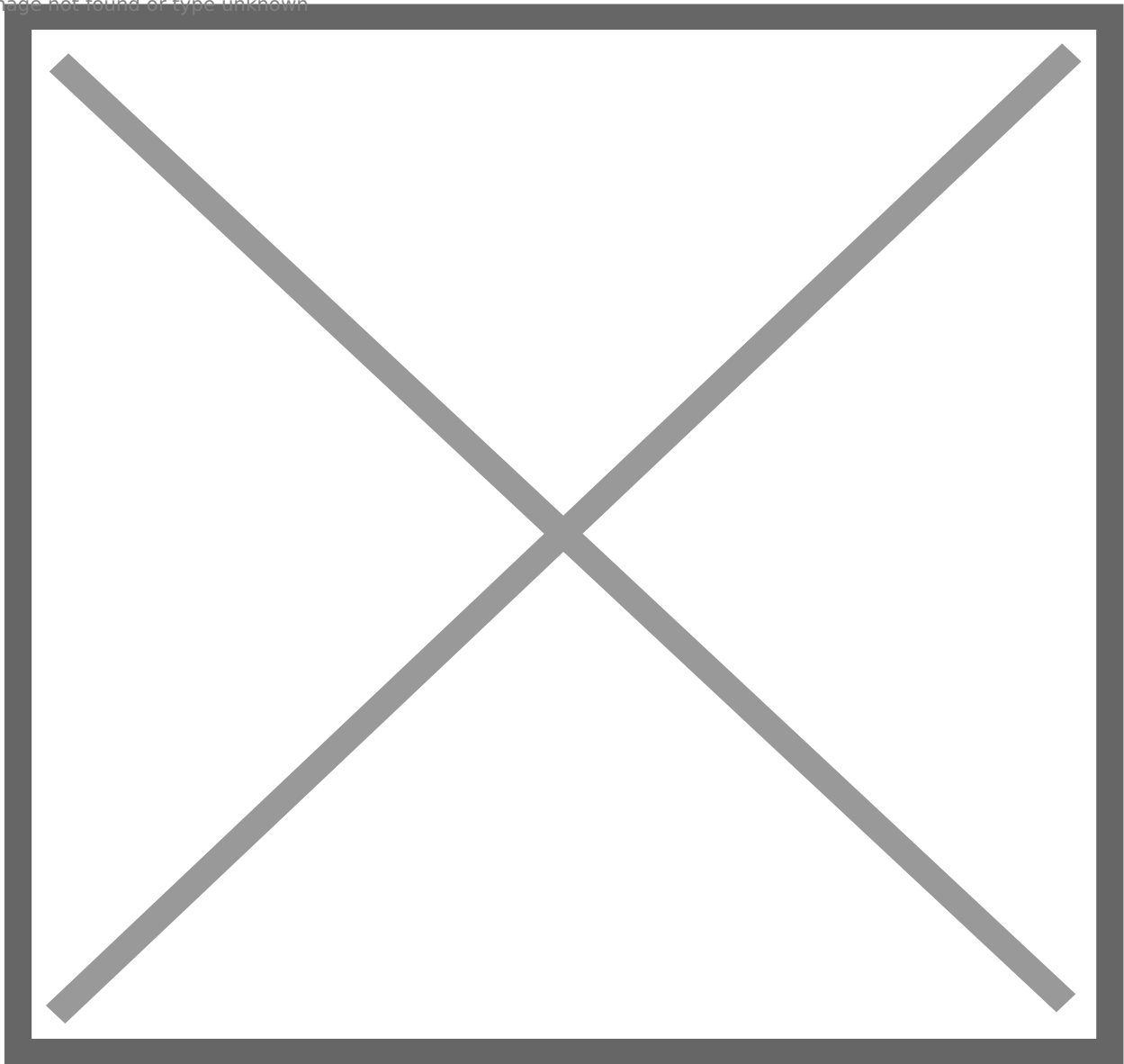
1. A two-panel representation of the best life vs the worst life, as described by Torquatus.
2. A two-panel possible contrast of the old and ugly bent over figure of Chrysippus (which we know from the actual statue) which we could contrast with a healthy and vibrant Epicurus holding out his hand in a gesture of friendship.
3. A two-panel contrast of Cleanthes' image off a debased pleasure served by the virtues, vs an Epicurean version of Pleasure as conveying the full strength and attractiveness of Pleasure as the reward of life.
4. A contrast between Cicero's intent that the host pouring the wine being in a much different state than the guest who is drinking it, contrasted against a view in which both the host and the guest are healthy and happy with their respective roles at that moment.

There are probably other allusions preserved in Cicero too. If a picture is worth a thousand words then good imagery contrasting Epicurean with standard Platonic/Stoic views of these scenes would be very valuable!

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2024 at 11:16 AM

This is not an illustration of Cleanthes' vision, but it is perhaps useful to this discussion:

Image not found or type unknown



[Man Having to Choose between the Virtues and Vices by Frans Francken the Younger](#)

Man Having to Choose between the Virtues and Vices Painting by Frans Francken the Younger
fineartamerica.com



Post by “Joshua” of January 28, 2024 at 1:55 PM



I notice that most of the figures in the painting are looking to this seated figure. How we should identify him is an interesting question. Matthew 10:10 reads; *Don't take a traveling bag for the*

road, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a walking stick, for the worker is worthy of his food. This may explain the bag and staff; an encumbrance tying the poor soul to this world? Alternatively, the cloak, staff and purse are the symbols of the philosopher, as on the Boscoreale cup. Originally these were associated with Cynicism, but the meaning expanded to include philosophers generally.

At any rate, the man is surrounded by other figures vying for his attention; Nike the goddess of Victory stands on a globe, offering him the world. Hermes is at his right ear, the god of commerce and trade, offering him security in wealth. Aphrodite is to his left (portrayed here with her girdle), offering pleasure; she gestures towards the bedroom and the richly furnished table. The child Eros is on hand as well, and offers Love.

In the center of the painting stands Jesus Christ, with Chalice and Host. To his right is Hercules, to his left is Achilles. Labor and Duty, perhaps? At the focal point in heaven is the Hebrew name of God, YHWH.

The left of the painting is obscure to me.

Post by “Joshua” of January 28, 2024 at 2:04 PM

I should note that my identification of Jesus *could* be Mary, but she is usually portrayed in blue clothes and while she is often depicted in adoration of the Host, she is seldom seen presenting it.

Why does Achilles look like a woman, you ask? Achilles is usually portrayed as an *Ephēbos*, an adolescent youth. In one famous episode he actually disguised himself as a maiden.

But bear in mind that all of this is just guesswork on my part.

Post by “Don” of January 28, 2024 at 5:31 PM

Speaking of mockery in this episode reminded me that Epicurus was not above that as well, according to Diogenes Laertius:

Quote from Diogenes Laertius

he himself in his letters says of Nausiphanes : "This so maddened him that he abused me and called me pedagogue." [8] Epicurus used to call this Nausiphanes jelly-fish,¹³ an illiterate, a fraud, and a trollop ; Plato's school he called "the toadies of Dionysius," their master himself the "golden" Plato,¹⁴ and Aristotle a profligate, who after devouring his patrimony took to soldiering and selling drugs ; Protagoras a pack-carrier and the scribe of Democritus and village schoolmaster ; Heraclitus a muddler¹⁵ ; Democritus Lerocritus (the nonsense-monger) ; and Antidorus Sannidorus (fawning gift-bearer) ; the Cynics foes of Greece ; the Dialecticians despoilers ; and Pyrrho an ignorant boor.

Post by “Don” of January 28, 2024 at 5:53 PM

And I agree with Joshua that Sparta is fascinating, although I would clearly choose Athens if I had to live in the ancient world! 😊

One thing I remember reading (source amnesia) was that some of Sparta's vaunted military reputation was deliberate spin and PR on THEIR part. They wanted people to fear them ... So they didn't actually HAVE to go into battle! They were constantly showing up late or negotiating out of battle. But their literally laconic one-liners and comebacks make for great reading!!