

Episode One Hundred - Concluding On Justice With A Shout To Keep The Virtues In Their Proper Place

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Welcome to Episode One Hundred of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

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.

At this point in our podcast we have completed our first line-by-line review of the poem, and we have turned to the presentation of Epicurean ethics found in Cicero's On Ends. Today we continue with that material and focus on "Justice" starting with line fifty-three, and we cap the discussion of the Virtues with Fragment 32 of the Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda.

Now let's join Joshua reading today's text:

[53] For the passions which proceed from nature are easily satisfied without committing any wrong; while we must not succumb to those which are groundless, since they yearn for nothing worthy of our craving, and more loss is involved in the mere fact of wrong doing, than profit in the results which are produced by the wrong doing. So one would not be right in describing even justice as a thing to be wished for on its own account, but rather because it brings with it a very large amount of agreeableness. For to be the object of esteem and affection is agreeable just because it renders life safer and more replete with pleasures. Therefore we think that wickedness should be shunned, not alone on account of the disadvantages which fall to the lot of the wicked, but much rather because when it pervades a man's soul it never permits him to breathe freely or to rest.

[54] But if the accolades passed even on the virtues themselves, over which the eloquence of all other philosophers especially runs riot, can find no vent unless it be referred to pleasure, and pleasure is the only thing which invites us to the pursuit of itself, and attracts us by reason of

its own nature, then there can be no doubt that of all things good it is the supreme and ultimate good, and that a life of happiness means nothing else but a life attended by pleasure.

[DIOGENES OF OINOANDA FRAGMENT 32:](#)

... [the latter] being as malicious as the former.

I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now.

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.

Suppose, then, someone were to ask someone, though it is a naive question, «who is it whom these virtues benefit?», obviously the answer will be «man.» The virtues certainly do not make provision for these birds flying past, enabling them to fly well, or for each of the other animals: they do not desert the nature with which they live and by which they have been engendered; rather it is for the sake of this nature that the virtues do everything and exist.

Each (virtue?) therefore means of (?) ... just as if a mother for whatever reasons sees that the possessing nature has been summoned there, it then being necessary to allow the court to asked what each (virtue?) is doing and for whom [We must show] both which of the desires are natural and which are not; and in general all things that [are included] in the [former category are easily attained]

From the [Wikipedia Page on the Battle of Philippi:](#)

[Plutarch](#) famously reported that Brutus experienced a vision of a ghost a few months before the battle. One night he saw a huge and shadowy form appearing in front of him; when he calmly asked, "What and whence art thou?" it answered "Thy evil spirit, Brutus: I shall see thee at Philippi." He again met the ghost the night before the battle. This episode is one of the most famous in [Shakespeare's](#) play [Julius Caesar](#). Plutarch also reports the last words of Brutus, quoted by a Greek tragedy "O wretched Virtue, thou wert but a name, and yet I worshipped thee as real indeed; but now, it seems, thou were but fortune's slave."

[David Sedley on the Ethics of Brutus and Cassius](#)

Sedley explains in significant detail that *“there was no Stoic tradition of advocating either tyrannicide or any comparable means of overthrowing repressive regimes. The ultimate Stoic model was Socrates, who had willingly accepted death rather than compromise his philosophical mission or moral stands. ... Likewise, the so-called “Stoic Opposition” of figures like Thrasea Paetus and Helvidus Priscus, despite their reverence for the memory of Brutus and Cassius, showed little if any interest in the assassination of emperors, and much more in courting a heroic death.... The very notion of political freedom rarely surfaces in Stoic texts....”*

Sedley states that Brutus’ Platonist background led him to oppose them because the Stoics *“taught that virtue alone is good, and that naturally preferable items like health, honor, and wealth are morally indifferent: when possessed, they add nothing to happiness. ... Whether or not you attain them is irrelevant to happiness.” “Ultimately Stoicism had to allow that no form of government would make the happy less happy or the wretched less wretched.”*

And Sedley says *“There was no established Stoic tradition of placing constitutions in order of preferability. Platonism, by contrast, had always classified and ranked constitutions, and had done so explicitly on the ground that the subjects in a state can be more or less happy according to its political provisions. It was on a sliding scale of this kind that Plato in Republic 8 had declared tyranny the worst kind of enslavement.”*

[Cicero Letters To And From Cassius](#)

[15.16] **Cicero to Cassius** [Rome, January, 45 B.C.]

L I expect you must be just a little ashamed of yourself now that this is the third letter that has caught you before you have sent me a single leaf or even a line. But I am not pressing you, for I shall look forward to, or rather insist upon, a longer letter. As for myself, if I always had somebody to trust with them, I should send you as many as three an hour. For it somehow happens, that whenever I write anything to you, you seem to be at my very elbow; and that, not by way of visions of images, as your new friends term them, who believe that even mental visions are conjured up by what Catius calls spectres (for let me remind you that Catius the Insubrian, an Epicurean, who died lately, gives the name of spectres to what the famous Gargettian [Epicurus], and long before that Democritus, called images).

2 But, even supposing that the eye can be struck by these spectres because they run up against it quite of their own accord, how the mind can be so struck is more than I can see. It will be your duty to explain to me, when you arrive here safe and sound, whether the spectre of you is at my command to come up as soon as the whim has taken me to think about you - and not only about you, who always occupy my inmost heart, but suppose I begin thinking about the Isle of Britain, will the image of that wing its way to my consciousness?

3 But of this later on. I am only sounding you now to see in what spirit you take it. For if you are angry and annoyed, I shall have more to say, and shall insist upon your being reinstated in that school of philosophy, out of which you have been ousted "by violence and an armed force." In

this formula the words "within this year" are not usually added; so even if it is now two or three years since, bewitched by the blandishments of Pleasure, you sent a notice of divorce to Virtue, I am free to act as I like. And yet to whom am I talking? To you, the most gallant gentleman in the world, who, ever since you set foot in the forum, have done nothing but what bears every mark of the most impressive distinction. Why, in that very school you have selected I apprehend there is more vitality than I should have supposed, if only because it has your approval. "

[15.19] **Cassius to Cicero** [Brundisium, latter half of January, 45 B.C.]

L I hope that you are well. I assure you that on this tour of mine there is nothing that gives me more pleasure to do than to write to you; for I seem to be talking and joking with you face to face. And yet that does not come to pass because of those spectres; and, by way of retaliation for that, in my next letter I shall let loose upon you such a rabble of [Stoic](#) boors that you will proclaim Catius a true-born Athenian.

2 I am glad that our friend Pansa was sped on his way by universal goodwill when he left the city in military uniform, and that not only on my own account, but also, most assuredly, on that of all our friends. For I hope that men generally will come to understand how much all the world hates cruelty, and how much it loves integrity and clemency, and that the blessings most eagerly sought and coveted by the bad ultimately find their way to the good. For it is hard to convince men that "the good is to be chosen for its own sake"; but that pleasure and tranquillity of mind is acquired by virtue, justice, and the good is both true and demonstrable. Why, Epicurus himself, from whom all the Catiuses and [Amafiniuses](#) in the world, incompetent translators of terms as they are, derive their origin, lays it down that "to live a life of pleasure is impossible without living a life of virtue and justice".

3 Consequently Pansa, who follows pleasure, keeps his hold on virtue, and those also whom you call pleasure-lovers are lovers of what is good and lovers of justice, and cultivate and keep all the virtues.

SUPPLEMENT:

[Principal Doctrines](#) and Vatican Sayings which are relevant to Justice.

[PD06](#). Whatever you can provide yourself with to secure protection from men is a natural good.

[PD07](#). Some men wished to become famous and conspicuous, thinking that they would thus win for themselves safety from other men. Wherefore if the life of such men is safe, they have obtained the good which nature craves; but if it is not safe, they do not possess that for which they strove at first by the instinct of nature.

[PD08](#). No pleasure is a bad thing in itself; but the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures.

[PD10](#). If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the evil of life.

[PD31](#). The justice which arises from nature is a pledge of mutual advantage, to restrain men from harming one another, and save them from being harmed.

[PD32](#). For all living things which have not been able to make compacts not to harm one another, or be harmed, nothing ever is either just or unjust; and likewise, too, for all tribes of men which have been unable, or unwilling, to make compacts not to harm or be harmed.

[PD33](#). Justice never is anything in itself, but in the dealings of men with one another, in any place whatever, and at any time, it is a kind of compact not to harm or be harmed. [see note below]

[PD34](#). Injustice is not an evil in itself, but only in consequence of the fear which attaches to the apprehension of being unable to escape those appointed to punish such actions.

[PD35](#). It is not possible for one who acts in secret contravention of the terms of the compact not to harm or be harmed to be confident that he will escape detection, even if, at present, he escapes a thousand times. For up to the time of death it cannot be certain that he will indeed escape.

[PD36](#). In its general aspect, justice is the same for all, for it is a kind of mutual advantage in the dealings of men with one another; but with reference to the individual peculiarities of a country, or any other circumstances, the same thing does not turn out to be just for all.

[PD37](#). Among actions which are sanctioned as just by law, that which is proved, on examination, to be of advantage, in the requirements of men's dealings with one another, has the guarantee of justice, whether it is the same for all or not. But if a man makes a law, and it does not turn out to lead to advantage in men's dealings with each other, then it no longer has the essential nature of justice. And even if the advantage in the matter of justice shifts from one side to the other, but for a while accords with the general concept, it is nonetheless just for that period, in the eyes of those who do not confound themselves with empty sounds, but look to the actual facts.

[PD38](#). Where, provided the circumstances have not been altered, actions which were considered just have been shown not to accord with the general concept, in actual practice, then they are not just. But where, when circumstances have changed, the same actions which were sanctioned as just no longer lead to advantage, they were just at the time, when they were of advantage for the dealings of fellow-citizens with one another, but subsequently they

are no longer just, when no longer of advantage.

[PD39](#). The man who has best ordered the element of disquiet arising from external circumstances has made those things that he could akin to himself, and the rest at least not alien; but with all to which he could not do even this, he has refrained from mixing, and has expelled from his life all which it was of advantage to treat thus.

[PD40](#). As many as possess the power to procure complete immunity from their neighbors, these also live most pleasantly with one another, since they have the most certain pledge of security, and, after they have enjoyed the fullest intimacy, they do not lament the previous departure of a dead friend, as though he were to be pitied.

VS07. It is hard for an evil-doer to escape detection, but to be confident that he will continue to escape detection indefinitely is impossible.

VS12. The just man is most free from disturbance, while the unjust is full of the utmost disturbance.

VS13. Among the things held to be just by law, whatever is proved to be of advantage in men's dealings has the stamp of justice, whether or not it be the same for all; but if a man makes a law and it does not prove to be mutually advantageous, then this is no longer just. And if what is mutually advantageous varies, and only for a time corresponds to our concept of justice, nevertheless for that time it is just, for those who do not trouble themselves about empty words, but look simply at the facts.

VS43. The love of money, if unjustly gained, is impious, and, if justly gained, is shameful; for it is unseemly to be parsimonious, even with justice on one's side.

VS62. Now if parents are justly angry with their children, it is certainly useless to fight against it, and not to ask for pardon; but if their anger is unjust and irrational, it is quite ridiculous to add fuel to their irrational passion by nursing one's own indignation, and not to attempt to turn aside their wrath in other ways by gentleness.