

Episode One Hundred Two - Corollaries to the Doctrines - Part Two

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Welcome to Episode One Hundred Two 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 examine a number of important corollaries of Epicurean doctrine.

Now let's join (Charles or Joshua) reading today's text:

[56] By this time so much at least is plain, that the intensest pleasure or the intensest annoyance felt in the mind exerts more influence on the happiness or wretchedness of life than either feeling, when present for an equal space of time in the body. We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain.

[57] But as we are elated by the blessings to which we look forward, so we delight in those which we call to memory. Fools however are tormented by the recollection of misfortunes; wise men rejoice in keeping fresh the thankful recollection of their past blessings. Now it is in the power of our wills to bury our adversity in almost unbroken forgetfulness, and to agreeably and sweetly remind ourselves of our prosperity. But when we look with penetration and concentration of thought upon things that are past, then, if those things are bad, grief usually ensues, if good, joy.

XVIII. What a noble and open and plain and straight avenue to a happy life! It being certain that nothing can be better for man than to be relieved of all pain and annoyance, and to have full enjoyment of the greatest pleasures both of mind and of body, do you not see how nothing is neglected which assists our life more easily to attain that which is its aim, the supreme good? Epicurus, the man whom you charge with being an extravagant devotee of pleasures, cries aloud that no one can live agreeably unless he lives a wise, moral and righteous life, and that no one can live a wise, moral and righteous life without living agreeably.

[58] It is not possible for a community to be happy when there is rebellion, nor for a house when its masters are at strife; much less can a mind at disaccord and at strife with itself taste any portion of pleasure undefiled and unimpeded. Nay more, if the mind is always beset by desires and designs which are recalcitrant and irreconcilable, it can never see a moment's rest or a moment's peace.

[59] But if agreeableness of life is thwarted by the more serious bodily diseases, how much more must it inevitably be thwarted by the diseases of the mind! Now the diseases of the mind are the measureless and false passions for riches, fame, power and even for the lustful pleasures. To these are added griefs, troubles, sorrows, which devour the mind and wear it away with anxiety, because men do not comprehend that no pain should be felt in the mind, which is unconnected with an immediate or impending bodily pain. Nor indeed is there among fools any one who is not sick with some one of these diseases; there is none therefore who is not wretched.

[60] There is also death which always hangs over them like the stone over Tantalus, and again superstition, which prevents those who are tinged by it from ever being able to rest. Moreover they have no memories for their past good fortune, and no enjoyment of their present; they only wait for what is to come, and as this cannot but be uncertain, they are wasted with anguish and alarm; and they are tortured most of all when they become conscious, all too late, that their devotion to wealth or military power, or influence, or fame has been entirely in vain. For they achieve none of the pleasures which they ardently hoped to obtain and so underwent numerous and severe exertions.