

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

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Welcome to Episode One Hundred Three 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 Martin reading today's text:

[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.

[61] Turn again to another class of men, trivial and pusillanimous, either always in despair about everything, or ill-willed, spiteful, morose, misanthropic, slanderous, unnatural; others again are slaves to the frivolities of the lover; others are aggressive, others reckless or impudent, while these same men are uncontrolled and inert, never persevering in their opinion, and for these reasons there never is in their life any intermission of annoyance. Therefore neither can any fool be happy, nor any wise man fail to be happy. And we advocate these views far better and with much greater truth than do the Stoics, since they declare that nothing good

exists excepting that vague phantom which they call morality, a title imposing rather than real; and that virtue being founded on this morality demands no pleasure and is satisfied with her own resources for the attainment of happiness.

[62] XIX. But these doctrines may be stated in a certain manner so as not merely to disarm our criticism, but actually to secure our sanction. For this is the way in which Epicurus represents the wise man as continually happy; he keeps his passions within bounds; about death he is indifferent; he holds true views concerning the eternal gods apart from all dread; he has no hesitation in crossing the boundary of life, if that be the better course. Furnished with these advantages he is continually in a state of pleasure, and there is in truth no moment at which he does not experience more pleasures than pains. For he remembers the past with thankfulness, and the present is so much his own that he is aware of its importance and its agreeableness, nor is he in dependence on the future, but awaits it while enjoying the present; he is also very far removed from those defects of character which I quoted a little time ago, and when he compares the fool's life with his own, he feels great pleasure. And pains, if any befall him, have never power enough to prevent the wise man from finding more reasons for joy than for vexation.

[63] It was indeed excellently said by Epicurus that fortune only in a small degree crosses the wise man's path, and that his greatest and most important undertakings are executed in accordance with his own design and his own principles, and that no greater pleasure can be reaped from a life which is without end in time, than is reaped from this which we know to have its allotted end. He judged that the logic of your school possesses no efficacy either for the amelioration of life or for the facilitation of debate. He laid the greatest stress on natural science. That branch of knowledge enables us to realize clearly the force of words and the natural conditions of speech and the theory of consistent and contradictory expressions; and when we have learned the constitution of the universe we are relieved of superstition, are emancipated from the dread of death, are not agitated through ignorance of phenomena, from which ignorance, more than any thing else, terrible panics often arise; finally, our characters will also be improved when we have learned what it is that nature craves. Then again if we grasp a firm knowledge of phenomena, and uphold that canon, which almost fell from heaven into human ken, that test to which we are to bring all our judgments concerning things, we shall never succumb to any man's eloquence and abandon our opinions.