

Episode One Hundred Eleven - Torquatus Summarizes The Significance of the Epicurus

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Welcome to Episode One Hundred Eleven 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 complete the section on Friendship.

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

[71] XXI. Wherefore, if the doctrines I have stated are more dazzling and luminous than the sun itself, if they are draughts drawn from nature's spring, if our whole argument establishes its credit entirely by an appeal to our senses, that is to say, to witnesses who are untainted and unblemished, if speechless babes and even dumb beasts almost cry out that with nature for our governor and guide there is no good fortune but pleasure, no adverse fortune but pain, and their verdict upon these matters is neither perverted nor tainted, are we not bound to entertain the greatest gratitude for the man who, lending his ear to this voice of nature, as I may call it, grasped it in so strong and serious a spirit that he guided all thoroughly sober-minded men into the track of a peaceful, quiet, restful, happy life? And though you think him ill-educated, the reason is that he held no education of any worth, but such as promoted the ordered life of happiness.

[72] Was he the man to spend his time in conning poets as I and Triarius do on your advice, when they afford no substantial benefit, and all the enjoyment they give is childish in kind, or was he the man to waste himself, like Plato, upon music, geometry, mathematics and astronomy, which not only start from false assumptions and so cannot be true, but if they were

true would not aid us one whit towards living a more agreeable, that is a better life? Was he, I ask, the man to pursue those arts and thrust behind him the art of living, an art of such moment, so laborious too, and correspondingly rich in fruit? Epicurus then is not uneducated, but those persons are uninstructed who think that subjects which it is disgraceful to a boy not to have learned, are to be learned through life into old age!

Rackham Translation:

XXI. If then the doctrine I have set forth is clearer and more luminous than daylight itself; if it is derived entirely from Nature's source; if my whole discourse relies throughout for confirmation on the unbiased and unimpeachable evidence of the senses; if lisping infants, nay even dumb animals, prompted by Nature's teaching, almost find voice to proclaim that there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain—and their judgment in these matters is neither sophisticated nor biased—ought we not to feel the greatest gratitude to him who caught this utterance of Nature's voice, and grasped its import so firmly and so fully that he has guided all sane-minded men into the paths of peace and happiness, calmness and repose?

You are pleased to think him uneducated. The reason is that he refused to consider any education worth the name that did not help to school us in happiness. Was he to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, in perusing poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but merely childish amusement? Was he to occupy himself like Plato with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which starting from false premises cannot be true, and which moreover if they were true would contribute nothing to make our lives pleasanter and therefore better? Was he, I say, to study arts like these, and neglect the master art, so difficult and correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living?

No! Epicurus was not uneducated: the real philistines are those who ask us to go on studying till old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learnt in boyhood.