

# Perspectives On "Proving" That Pleasure is "The Good"

Post by "Cassius" of December 21, 2022 at 8:40 AM

Several good recent posts there, and I want to think more about what Todd is saying but I think he's got an interesting approach. We have talked regularly about it being more appropriate to talk about pleasure as the "Guide" rather than "the good" - along the lines of Lucretius' "Diva voluptus, dux vitae" / divine pleasure GUIDE of life. I think Todd may be sensing the same issue.

## [Quote from Todd](#)

Pleasure isn't just a good. You can't even talk about goods until you have a standard to determine what is a good anyway.

Yes. Pleasure is more than anything else one of the two FEELINGS. A feeling has both aspects at least in the way we think of it, as both a guide and good in itself. If you abstract it too far into some "definition" of the good it loses its meaning.

I also want to memorialize a couple of thoughts on earlier posts, primarily, the issue Todd raised about whether pointing to babies is the most sound argument, and then Charles saying that we really need to be looking at this in terms of what is persuasive.

I continue to think that we should look at Lucretius' poem as not just "physics" but what we call it in the intro to the podcast, something like "the only surviving complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world." (Caveat - I still want to explore Emily Austin's suggestion that there was a final section of the original plague of Athens story that is missing and would have made a great finale.)

Whether Torquatus has his statement about Epicurus refusing to look to elaborate logical argument or not, it does seem pretty clear that he preferred arguments that go directly to the senses in a "seeing is believing sense." The best and most persuasive argument is "Look at what is right there in front of you."

And if we look at Lucretius I think it is easy to see the "hymn to Venus" as not some flight of poetic fancy, but exactly such a "look there" argument. Lucretius never gives an elaborate logical argument for pleasure as the guide of life. But he does start off at the very beginning of his poem with what is essentially a "Look there!" --

#### Quote from Lucretius - Brown Translation

MOTHER of Rome, Delight of Men and Gods, Sweet Venus; who with vital power does fill the sea bearing the ships, the fruitful Earth, all things beneath the rolling signs of Heaven; for it is by Thee that creatures of every kind conceive, rise into life, and view the Sun's bright beams. Thee, Goddess, Thee the winds avoid; the clouds fly Thee and Thy approach. With various art the Earth, for Thee, affords her sweetest flowers; for Thee the sea's rough waves put on their smiles, and the smooth sky shines with diffused light. For when the buxom Spring leads on the year, and genial gales of western winds blow fresh, unlocked from Winter's cold, the airy birds first feel Thee, Goddess, and express thy power. Thy active flame strikes through their very souls. And then the savage beasts, with wanton play, frisk over the cheerful fields, and swim the rapid streams. So pleased with thy sweetness, so transported by thy soft charms, all living Nature strives, with sharp desire, to follow Thee, her Guide, where Thou art pleased to lead. In short, Thy power, inspiring every breast with tender love, drives every creature on with eager heat, in seas, in mountains, in swiftest floods, in leafy forests, and in verdant plains, to propagate their kind from age to age. [21] Since Thou, alone, doest govern Nature's laws, and nothing, without Thee, can rise to light, without Thee nothing can look gay or lovely;

And I have one more thing to say about babies. Todd points out that it is questionable to look *\*only\** at babies for data. We've also discussed that no could credibly suggest that we want to go back to an infantile state of existence in general, totally dependent on others and with very little ability to judge how to successfully avoid pain and pursue pleasure.

But there *\*is\** one aspect of babies and the young of all species that I do think that Epicurus would have endorsed, and that is the absolute lack of doubt in the mind of infants that the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the prime directive of nature. The "perversion" or "corruption" after that which is referenced in Torquatus is obviously not in *\*every respect\**. As our minds mature we gain the ability to judge better and successfully pursue pleasure and avoid pain. But the way in which we often *\*do\** get corrupted and perverted is that we are seduced by priests and supernatural religion and false philosophers who talk of "true worlds" beyond this one. We are infected by their poison and we lose our confidence in nature as providing the clear standard of feeling as the only way to ultimately base our decisions on as to what to choose and avoid.

So at the very least I do think that Epicurus would have compared the single-mindedness of new-born youth against the corruption that comes from religion and false philosophic influences that are primarily external and that turn us away from confidence that nature has provided pleasure and pain as our guides.