

# Episode 200 - Lucretius Today 200th Episode - Retrospective, Recap, and Looking To The Future

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2023 at 6:03 AM

One of the things I would like to see us discuss in this episode is something to the effect of the "transformational power of studying the texts," and here is an example:

When you combine our recent discussions about pleasure including both the "stimulation kind of pleasure" and the "appreciation of being alive-and-not-in-pain kind of pleasure," I think from here on I am never going to see the opening of Books One and Two of Lucretius as I did before.

Formerly I saw the opening of book one as a "hymn to Venus," which seems a nice way to label it but out of place in a non-religious book. And I formerly saw the "it is sweet to observe the shipwrecks of the fools" as kind of weird, and as Joshua and others often note, a little off-putting and lacking in compassion. I remember us discussing this with Emily Austin as even seeing it as a "slip" of Lucretius not being on his best form.

At this point, after all our discussions, I think from here on I am going to see these two openings as illustrating these two aspects of pleasure from which Dewitt concludes "The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism."

From that perspective, I think we can see Lucretius giving a shockingly prominent position in his poem to hammering home this point about Epicurus' innovation: The two openings show how pleasure comes both through (1) the stimulations of Venus (toward sex and trade on the oceans and all the other activities that we pursue at the leading of pleasure), as well as through (2) the workings of our mind through true philosophy which lead us to appreciate how great a pleasure it is to be alive when we are free from disaster. This is a type of gladness that can come only through "scheme of systematic contemplation" and the mind being prepared to figure these things out, which alone can give us "the confident expectation of their continuance."

For most of the close to fifteen years of my reading of Lucretius and Epicurean texts I don't think I would have noticed, much less appreciated, that these parallels could be drawn in the way Lucretius is structuring his poem.

Rather than seeing the poem as mainly a dry physics discussion that focuses on the gods being natural ([PD01](#)) and there being no existence after death ([PD02](#)), you can also see the poem as hammering home this point about the extension of the concept of pleasure being everything going on when we are not in pain ([PD03](#)). Rather than seeing Venus' calming influence on Mars in the opening of book one as a weirdly inappropriate thing for an "anti-religious" poet to say, we can see that too as an application of [PD04](#), in which we have access to pleasure to allow us

to offset and endure the pains that sometimes come upon us. Venus calming Mars reflects Epicurus' use of gladness of mind to calm the pains of his disease.

Whether these observations are what was in Lucretius' mind or not, I think they are useful, and they would never have occurred to me to consider in the same way before we focused so much attention on these issues. You just aren't going to get that kind of appreciation of what is going on without study into the deeper aspects of the philosophy, just like the "light of day" isn't good enough to observe on its own without appreciating what it illuminates.