

# Episode 212 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 19 - Can "Pleasure" Be Defended In The Public Square?

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Welcome to Episode 212 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](http://EpicureanFriends.com), where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we continue our discussion of Book Two of Cicero's On Ends, which is largely devoted Cicero's attack on Epicurean Philosophy. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#). Check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

This week we move into Section XXII:

XXII. Oh, but Epicurus says (this indeed is your strong point) that no one can live agreeably who does not live morally. As though I gave any heed to what he affirms or denies! The question I ask is, what statement is consistent for a man to make, who builds his highest good upon pleasure. What do you allege to shew that Thorius, that Hirrius, that Postumius, and the master of all these men, Orata, did not live very agreeable lives? He himself, as I mentioned already, asserts that the life of sybarites is not worthy of blame, unless they are utterly foolish, that is, unless they are subject to passion and fear. And when he proffers a remedy for both these conditions, he proffers immunity to sybaritism. For if these two conditions are removed, he says that he finds nothing to blame in the life of profligates. You cannot therefore, while guiding all actions by pleasure, either defend or maintain virtue. For a man who refrains from injustice only to avoid evil must not be considered a good and just man; you know of course the saying, no one is righteous, whose righteousness...; well, never suppose that any saying is truer.

He is not indeed a just man, so long as his fear lasts, and assuredly he will not be so if he ceases to fear; while he will cease to fear if he is able either to conceal or by the aid of great resources to secure anything he has done, and will undoubtedly choose to be regarded as a good man, though not really so, rather than to be good, without being considered good. So you most disgracefully enjoin and press upon us in a kind of way a pretense of justice in the place of the true and indubitable justice; you wish us to disregard the firm ground of inner

consciousness and to catch at the wandering fancies of other men. And the same statements may be made about the rest of the virtues, whose foundations, in every case, you pitch upon pleasure, as you might upon water. Well, can we call the same old Torquatus a brave man? You see I take delight, although I cannot pervert you, as you call it, I take delight, I repeat, both in your family and your name, and I declare that before my eyes there rises a vision of that most excellent man and very true friend of mine, Aulus Torquatus, whose great and conspicuous zeal for me at that crisis which is familiar to every one, must be well known to both of you; though I myself, while anxious to be and to be considered thankful, should not think such services deserving of gratitude, were it not plain to me that he was my friend for my sake and not for his own; unless by his own sake you hint at the fact that to do what is right brings advantage to all. If you mean this, I have won the victory; for what I desire and am struggling for is that duty should be duty's own reward. That philosopher of yours will not have it so, but requires pleasure from everything as a kind of fee. But I return to our old Torquatus; if it was for the sake of pleasure that he fought his combat with the Gaul on the banks of the Anio, when challenged, and if from the spoils of the foe he invested himself at once with the necklet and the title from any other motive than the feeling that such exploits beseeem a man, then I do not regard him as brave. Further, if honour, if loyalty, if chastity, if in a word temperance,— if all these are to be governed by dread of retribution or of disgrace, and are not to sustain themselves by their own inherent purity, what kind of adultery, or impurity, or passion will not take its heedless and headlong course, if either concealment is promised to it, or freedom from punishment, or immunity ? Why, Torquatus, what a state of things does this seem, that you with your name, abilities and distinctions, cannot venture to confess before a public meeting your actions, your thoughts, your aims, your objects, or what that thing is from love of which you desire to carry 'your undertakings to completion, in fine what it is that you judge to be the best thing in life ? What would you be willing to take, on condition that when once you have entered on your office and risen before the assembly (you know you must announce what rules you intend to follow in your administration of the law, and perhaps too, if you think it good to do so, you will say something about your own ancestry and yourself, after the custom of our forefathers) —well then, what would you take to declare that during your term of office you will do everything with a view to pleasure, and that you have never done anything during life except with a view to pleasure? You say, do you suppose me to be such a madman as to speak before ignorant men in that fashion? But make the same statements in court, or, if you are afraid of the crowd, make them in the senate. You will never do it. Why not, unless it be that such speech is disgraceful? Do you suppose then that I and Triarius are fit persons to listen to your disgraceful talk?

XXIII. But let us grant this: the very name pleasure has no prestige, and we perhaps do not understand it; for you philosophers say over and over again, that we do not understand what kind of pleasure you mean. Surely it is a hard and abstruse subject! When you speak of atoms and spaces between universes, which do not and cannot exist, then we understand ; and can we not understand pleasure, which every sparrow knows so well? What if I bring you to admit that I not only know what pleasure is (it is indeed an agreeable activity affecting the sense) but what you intend it to be? At one time you intend it to mean exactly what I just now indicated,

and imply by the name that it is something active, and produces a certain variation ; at another time you speak of a certain other supreme pleasure, which is incapable of increase ; this you say is present when all pain is absent; this you call stable pleasure. Let us grant that this is pleasure. State before any public meeting you like that you do everything with a view to avoiding pain. If you think that even this statement cannot be made with proper honour and dignity, say that both during your term of office and your whole life you intend always to act with an eye to your interest, doing nothing but what is profitable, nothing in fine except for your own private sake; what kind of uproar do you think there will be, or what hope will you have of the consulship, which is now very well assured to you? Do you mean then to follow a system such that you adopt it when alone and in the company of your friends but do not venture to proclaim it or make it public? But in reality when you attend the courts or the senate you have always on your lips the language of the Peripatetics and the Stoics. Duty and equity, honour and loyalty, uprightness and morality, everything worthy of the empire and the Roman people, all kind of dangers to be faced for the commonwealth, death due to our country,—when you talk in this strain, we simpletons are overcome, but you I suppose laugh in your sleeve. Verily among these phrases, splendid and noble as they are, no place is found for pleasure, not merely for that pleasure which you philosophers say lies in activity, which all men in town and country, all I say, who speak Latin, call pleasure, but even for this stable pleasure, which no one but you entitles pleasure.

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