

Episode 213 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 20 - No One But You Epicureans Define Pleasure As You Do! Why Do You Disguise Yourselves?

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Welcome to Episode 213 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, 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 XXIII:

REID EDITION

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.

XXIV. Consider then whether you ought not to avoid adopting our language, along with opinions of your own. If you were to disguise your features or your gait in order to make yourself appear more dignified, you would be unlike yourself; are you the man to disguise your language, and say what you do not think? Or to keep one opinion for your home, as you might a suit of clothes, and another for the streets, so that you bear on your brow a mere pretense, while the truth is concealed within? Consider, I pray you, whether this is honest. I believe that those tenets are true which are moral, praiseworthy and noble, which are to be proclaimed in the senate, before the people, and in every public meeting and assembly, for fear that men should feel no shame in thinking what they feel shame in stating. What room can there be for friendship, or who can be a friend to any one whom he does not love for that friend's sake? What does loving, from which the word friendship comes, mean, unless that a man desires some one to be endowed with the greatest possible blessings, even though no benefit accrues to himself from them? It is advantageous to me, says he, to entertain such feelings, Say rather, perhaps, to be thought to entertain them. For you cannot entertain them, unless you really mean to do so; and how can you do so, unless love itself takes possession of you? And love is not usually brought about by calculating the balance of advantage, but is self-created, and springs into existence unsolicited. Oh, but it is advantage that I look to. Then friendship will last just so long as advantage attends it, and if advantage establishes friendship, it will also remove it. But what will you do, pray, if, as often happens, friendship is deserted by advantage? Will you abandon it? What sort of friendship is that? Will you cleave to it? How is that consistent? You see what principles you have laid down about friendship being desirable with a view to advantage. I am afraid of incurring unpopularity, if I cease to support my friend. First I ask why such a proceeding deserves to be unpopular, unless because it is disgraceful? But if you refrain from abandoning your friend, from the fear that you may meet with some inconvenience, still you will wish him to die, that you may not be tied to him without any profit. What if he not merely brings you no advantage but you have to make sacrifices of your property, to undergo exertions, to face the risk of your life? Will you not even then glance at yourself and reflect that every man is born to pursue his own interests and his own pleasures? Will you give yourself up to a despot, to suffer death as surety for your friend, even as the Pythagorean of old submitted to the Sicilian despot, or while you are really Pylades, will you assert yourself to be Orestes, from the wish to die in your friend's stead, or if you were really Orestes, would you try to

disprove Pylades' story, and disclose yourself, and failing to convince, would you refuse to petition against the execution of you both at once?

RACKHAM EDITION:

XXIII. "But let us grant your position. The actual word 'pleasure' has not a lofty sound; and perhaps we do not understand its significance : you are always repeating that we do not understand what you mean by pleasure. As though it were a difficult or recondite notion! If we understand you when you talk of 'indivisible atoms' and 'cosmic interspaces,' things that don't exist and never can exist, is our intelligence incapable of grasping the meaning of pleasure, a feeling known to every sparrow? What if I force you to admit that I do know not only what pleasure really is (it is an agreeable activity of the sense), but also what you mean by it? For at one moment you mean by it the feeling that I have just defined, and this you entitle kinetic pleasure, as producing a definite change of feeling, but at another moment you say it is quite a different feeling, which is the acme and climax of pleasure, but yet consists merely in the complete absence of pain; this you call static' pleasure. Well, grant that pleasure is the latter sort of feeling. Profess in any public assembly that the motive of all your actions is the desire to avoid pain. If you feel that this too does not sound sufficiently dignified and respectable, say that you intend both in your present office and all your life long to act solely for the sake of your own advantage, — to do nothing but what will pay, nothing in short that is not for your own interest; imagine the uproar among the audience! What would become of your chances of the consulship, which as it is seems to be a certainty for you in the near future?

Will you then adopt a rule of life which you can appeal to in private and among friends but which you dare not openly profess or parade in public? Ah, but it is the vocabulary of the Peripatetics and the Stoics that is always on your lips, in the law-courts and the senate. Duty, Fair-dealing, Moral Worth, Fidelity, Uprightness, Honour, the Dignity of office, the Dignity of the Roman People, Risk all for the state. Die for your Country, — when you talk in this style, we simpletons stand gaping in admiration, — and you no doubt laugh in your sleeve. For in that glorious array of high-sounding words, pleasure finds no place, not only what your school calls kinetic pleasure, which is what every one, polished or rustic, every one, I say, who can speak Latin, means by pleasure, but not even this static pleasure, which no one but you Epicureans would call pleasure at all.

XXIV. Well then, are you sure you have any right to employ our words with meanings of your own? If you assumed an unnatural expression or demeanour, in order to look more important, that would be insincere. Are you then to affect an artificial language, and say what you do not think? Or are you to change your opinions like your clothes, and have one set for indoor wear and another when you walk abroad? Outside, all show and pretence, but your genuine self concealed within? Reflect, I beg of you, is this honest? In my view those opinions are true which are honourable, praiseworthy and noble — which can be openly avowed in the senate and the popular assembly, and in every company and gathering, so that one need not be ashamed to

say what one is not ashamed to think.

Again, how will friendship be possible? How can one man be another man's friend, if he does not love him in and for himself? What is the meaning of 'to love' — from which our word for friendship is derived — except to wish some one to receive the greatest possible benefits even though one gleans no advantage therefrom oneself? 'It pays me,' says he, to be a disinterested friend.' No, perhaps it pays you to seem so. Be so you cannot, unless you really are; but how can you be a disinterested friend unless you feel genuine affection? Yet affection does not commonly result from any calculation of expediency. It is a spontaneous growth; it springs up of itself. But, you will say, I am guided by expediency.' Then your friendship will last just so long as it is attended by expediency. If expediency creates the feeling it will also destroy it. But what, pray, will you do, if, as often happens, expediency parts company with friendship? Will you throw your friend over? What sort of friendship is that? Will you keep him? How does that square with your principles? You remember your pronouncement that friendship is desirable for the sake of expediency. I might become unpopular if I left a friend in the lurch.' Well, in the first place, why is such conduct unpopular, unless because it is base? And if you refrain from deserting a friend because to do so will have inconvenient consequences, still you will long for his death to release you from an unprofitable tie. What if he not only brings you no advantage, but causes you to suffer loss of property, to undergo toil and trouble, to risk your life?

Will you not even then take interest into account, and reflect that each man is born for himself and for his own pleasure? Will you go bail with your life to a tyrant on behalf of a friend, as the famous Pythagorean did to the Sicilian despot? or being Pylades, will you say you are Orestes, so as to die in your friend's stead? or supposing you were Orestes, would you say Pylades was lying and reveal your identity, and if they would not believe you, would you make no appeal against your both dying together?

XXV. Yes, Torquatus, you personally would do all these things; for I do not believe there is any high or noble action which fear of pain or death could induce you to forgo. But the question is not what conduct is consistent with your character, but what is consistent with your tenets. The system you uphold, the principles you have studied and accept, undermine the very foundations of friendship, however much Epicurus may, as he does, praise friendship up to the skies. But, you tell me, Epicurus himself had many friends. Who pray denies that Epicurus was a good man, and a kind and humane man? In these discussions it is his intellect and not his character that is in question. Let us leave to the frivolous Greeks the wrong-headed habit of attacking and abusing the persons whose views of truth they do not share. Epicurus may have been a kind and faithful friend; but if my opinion is right (for I do not dogmatize), he was not a very acute thinker.

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