

# Episode 219 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 26 - Cicero Continues His Attack On Epicurus' Position On Pain

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Welcome to Episode 219 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](#).

Last week we focused on Cicero's allegation that luck places the happy life out of reach of many Epicureans. This week we pick up at the start of Section XXIX - REID EDITION -

XXIX. Again when you say that great pain is short, while prolonged pain is light, I do not understand what it is that you mean. For I am acquainted with instances where pains were not only great but also prolonged for a considerable time; and yet for enduring them there is another and truer method, of which you who do not love morality for its own sake cannot avail yourselves. There are certain maxims, and I might almost say enactments, concerning courage, which prohibit a man from being womanish in the midst of pain. So we must think it disgraceful, I do not say to feel pain (for that certainly is occasionally inevitable) but to make that old rock of Lemnus ghostly with the roarings of a Philoctetes, *which, by echoing back the shriekings, cryings, groanings, sighings, dumb though it be, returns the sounds of lamentation.*

Let Epicurus chant his prophecy to such an one, if he can, one whose veins within him, tainted with poison from the serpent's tooth, bubble with foul torments. Says Epicurus: hush, Philoctetes, your pain is short. But for nearly ten years already he has been lying sick in his cave. If 'tis long 'tis light; for it has its pauses, and sometimes slackens. First, it is not often so; next what is this slackening worth, when not only is the recollection of past pain fresh in the mind, but the dread of future and imminent pain causes a torment? Let the man die, says he.

Perhaps it is best so, but what becomes of your saying there is always a balance of pleasure? For if that is true, see that you be not committing a crime in advising death. Rather hold language such as this, namely, that it is disgraceful, that it is unmanly to be weakened by pain, to be broken by it and conquered. For your maxim "if 'tis hard, 'tis short, if 'tis long, 'tis light," are a mere parrot's lesson. Pain is usually assuaged by the soothing application of virtue, I mean loftiness of spirit, endurance and courage.

XXX. Not to digress too far, hear what Epicurus says on his death-bed, that you may perceive how his actions are at variance with his maxims: Epicurus wishes health to Hermarchus. I write this letter (he says) while passing a happy day, and the last of my life. Pains in the bladder and intestines are upon me, so severe that their intensity cannot be increased. Wretched creature! If pain is the greatest of evils we cannot call him anything else. But let us listen to the man himself. Still, all these are outweighed, he says, by elation of mind arising from the recollection of my theories and discoveries. But do you, as befits the feelings you have entertained from your youth up for me and for philosophy, remember to protect the children of Metrodorus.

After this I do not admire the death of Epaminondas or of Leonidas more than this man's death; though one of these, after winning a victory over the Lacedaemonians at Mantinea, and finding that his life was ebbing away, owing to a serious wound, asked, as soon as he saw how things stood, whether his shield was safe. When his weeping comrades had answered that it was, he asked whether the enemy had been routed. When he heard that this too was as he desired, he ordered that the spear which had pierced him should be extracted. So he died from the copious flow of blood, in a moment of exultation and victory.

Leonidas again, the king of the Lacedaemonians, along with the three hundred men whom he had led from Sparta, when the choice lay between a base retreat and a splendid death, confronted the enemy at Thermopylae. The deaths of generals are celebrated, while philosophers mostly die in their beds. Still it makes a difference how they die. This philosopher thought himself happy at the moment of death. A great credit to him. My intense pains, he says, are outweighed by elation of mind. The voice I hear is indeed that of a true philosopher, Epicurus, but you have forgotten what you ought to say. For, first, if there is truth in those matters which you say it causes you joy to recall, I mean, if your writings and discoveries are true, you cannot feel joy, since you now possess no blessing which you can set down to the account of the body; whereas you have always told us that no one can feel joy unless on account of the body, nor pain either. I feel joy in my past joys, he tells me. What past joys? If you say those relating to the body, I read that you set against your pains your philosophical theories, and not any recollection of pleasures enjoyed by the body; if you say those relating to the mind, then your maxim is untrue, that there is no joy of the mind, which has not a relation to the body. Why after that do you give a commission about the children of Metrodorus? What is there about your admirable goodness and extreme loyalty (for so I judge it to be) that you connect with the body?

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