

Episode 269 - By Pleasure We Mean The Absence of Pain (All Experience That Is Not Painful)

Post by "Godfrey" of February 26, 2025 at 2:04 PM

Another fine podcast! 👍

During your discussion of the proem to Lucretius' Book 2, my mind was roaming as it tends to do in the fog of morning....

The trope of standing above or far from a battle or disaster, I think, relates directly to the Stoic exercise of "the view from above". I'm not exactly sure what the Stoic take on this exercise is: one's insignificance? how we're just like ants running around? But Lucretius' take is to use "the view from above" to examine pleasure.

Further afield, as it were: for some reason, this proem brought to mind the movie Gladiator II. From there, it occurred to me that Lucretius may have been inspired by attendance at the Coliseum spectacles. In each of these cases, pleasure is derived from watching the suffering of others, but the experience is quite different from watching misfortune unfold in real time and in person, however remote. Having recently observed the latest LA wildfires from atop a neighborhood bluff, I can attest that any pleasure (maybe a feeling of relative safety?) is more than offset by horror at what is transpiring, and the thought that it could spread. (A storm at sea often continues ashore; the victors of a bloody battle may be inspired by blood lust to rape and pillage the defenseless citizens nearby.) The same scene, viewed in a cineplex or a theatrical stage, occurs at a remove from which the musings of Lucretius are far more understandable. And more Epicurean, I posit. Of course, this is my take from 2025, which may bear no relation to Lucretius' day. Or perhaps it does.

The marine layer now dissipated: to work.