

# Episode 271 - TD01 - Understanding Epicurus Through Tusculan Disputations

Post by "Cassius" of March 7, 2025 at 2:09 PM

More thoughts prior to recording this episode on 3/9:

The first part of Tusculum Disputations focuses on death. Cicero actually seems to embrace some Epicurean arguments in support of the idea that death is not "bad" for us if we cease to exist. In the end however he seems to focus on the benefits of continuing to exist after death, and this is where Cicero says that he would rather be wrong with Plato than right with those (presumably including Epicurus) who don't believe that the soul survives death.

There are also a couple of comments about Epicurean criticism of Democritus in regard to death, and no one but Epicureans reading Epicurean books.

The majority of the material that is likely to be of interest to us however probably starts in Book 2 and is regard to how we should view pain. I think we are going to find that Cicero largely misrepresents how "pain-adverse" Epicurus is, but this is going to give us the opportunity to revisit in more detail many of the issues that we regularly have to address -- i.e., was Epicurus in fact fixated on avoiding pain in the manner of a hypochondriac or someone we might describe as having a "phobia," as Cicero wants to paint him, or was something else going on.

We often spend a lot of time talking about the desirability of pleasure, and this will give us the opportunity to talk about how we can explain the pleasure-pain calculation in a way that doesn't give in to negative stereotypes. These negative stereotypes are a major reason that "regular people" are initially persuaded that Stoicism is superior, and it will be good to talk about various ways to point out that those stereotypes are wrong. We have the examples and arguments cited by Torquatus in Book One to draw on, and if others have suggestions for us to include please let us know.

For example I regularly see references to the camp of Julius Caesar having turned into a breeding-down for Epicureanism among Cassius Longinus and others of Caesar's followers, so this will be a good episode to discuss the combination of Epicurean philosophy with strong action.

Other examples may include:

1 - Cicero's letter to Cassius Longinus, among other aspects of which includes Cicero's remark that he had apparently misjudged the vigor of Epicurean philosophy given Cassius' actions;

2 - Lucian's references to the Epicurean who stood up against Alexander the Oracle-Monger and almost got stoned for doing so, as well as Lucian's general reference that the situation with

Alexander called for a Democritus or an Epicurus to stand up against Alexander and expose his fraud;

No doubt there are other example that can be used to show that being an Epicurean doesn't make one a pain-phobic pushover.