

Episode 296 - Ancient Criticisms Of Epicurean "Absence of Pain" Echo In The Modern World

Post by "Cassius" of August 22, 2025 at 5:24 PM

Welcome to Episode 296 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 we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

Once again this week Joshua is away, and in the absence of our other podcasters today I want to use the time we have to take a look at some of the extensive comment and discussion we've had as a result of last week's episode.

The topic we'll focus on this week is primarily Plutarch's allegations in Section 7 and 8 of his essay "That Living According to Epicurus is Not Possible. In those sections Plutarch alleged that even the animals pursue joy and delight when they have satisfied their essential needs of life such as for food and water, but that Epicurus - according to Plutarch - would deny his followers those same pleasures, on the grounds that the Epicurean goal is "absence of pain" rather than pleasure in the sense of joy and delight.

We had many good comments from our forum members since the release of that podcast, and we'll discuss a number of them here today.

In responding to the same allegations made by Plutarch, we'll also consult a reference that professor Norman Dewitt. In his book "Epicurus and His Philosopher," DeWitt cited an allegation by P.E. More, an academic authority who wrote in his 1923 book: "What, in a word, is to be said of a philosophy that begins with regarding pleasure as the only positive good and ends by emptying pleasure of all positive content?"

The full passage will examine is quoted in last week's discussion here:

Post

[RE: Episode 295 - Plutarch's Absurd Interpretation of Epicurean Absence of Pain](#)

This is a long quote but think the forum software will provide a collapsible box so it doesn't break the flow of the thread. The analysis is perverse just as DeWitt describes it, but it's well

worth reading in full as an expansive interpretation in modern language of Plutarch's criticism. This is a position that is widespread and if you're a fan of Epicurus you need to understand the argument and have a position on why it is wrong. Rolfe who is asking the question and Don who read Plutarch...



Cassius

August 22, 2025 at 8:38 AM

In the absence of Joshua and Don I'll probably provide more questions than answers, but we can discuss these issues on the forum and in future podcasts when Joshua and Don return. Even if we don't provide any brilliant new insights today, the material we'll discuss present questions that have stark and conflicting possible answers, and every student of Epicurus has to answer these for themselves if they really want to understand what's at the heart of Epicurean philosophy.

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