

Episode 317 - TD43 - The Epicurean "System Of Counterbalancing" In Pursuit Of Pleasure

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Welcome to Episode 317 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.

We are closing in on the end of those portions of Tusculan Disputations that are most relevant to Epicurean philosophy today, so we'll pick up this week with more on [Section 32 of Part 5](#).

XXXIII.

You see, I imagine, how Epicurus has divided his kinds of desires, not very acutely perhaps, but yet usefully: saying, that they are "partly natural and necessary; partly natural, but not necessary; partly neither. That those which are necessary may be supplied almost for nothing; for that the things which nature requires are easily obtained." As to the second kind of desires, his opinion is, that any one may easily either enjoy or go without them. And with regard to the third, since they are utterly frivolous, being neither allied to necessity nor nature, he thinks that they should be entirely rooted out. On this topic a great many arguments are adduced by the Epicureans; and those pleasures which they do not despise in a body, they disparage one by one, and seem rather for lessening the number of them: for as to wanton pleasures, on which subject they say a great deal, these, say they, are easy, common, and within any one's reach; and they think that if nature requires them, they are not to be estimated by birth, condition, or rank, but by shape, age, and person: and that it is by no means difficult to refrain from them, should health, duty, or reputation require it; but that pleasures of this kind may be desirable, where they are attended with no inconvenience, but can never be of any use. And the assertions which Epicurus makes with respect to the whole of pleasure, are such as show his opinion to be that pleasure is always desirable, and to be pursued merely because it is pleasure; and for the same reason pain is to be avoided, because it is pain. So that a wise man will always adopt such a system of counterbalancing as to do himself the justice to avoid pleasure, should pain ensue from it in too great a proportion; and will submit to pain, provided the effects of it are to produce a greater pleasure: so that all pleasurable things, though the corporeal senses are the judges of them, are still to be referred to the mind, on which account the body rejoices, whilst it perceives a present pleasure; but that the mind not only perceives the present as well as the body, but foresees it, while it is coming, and even when it is past will

not let it quite slip away. So that a wise man enjoys a continual series of pleasures, uniting the expectation of future pleasure to the recollection of what he has already tasted. The like notions are applied by them to high living; and the magnificence and expensiveness of entertainments are deprecated, because nature is satisfied at a small expense.

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