

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

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2026 at 9:32 PM

In this week's episode, part of what we discuss is the following section from XXXIII which was new to Joshua and me when we came across it. In tonight's 20th Zoom there was a general idea that this is likely referring to sex / romantic relations, but all ideas will be appreciated.

There are two things going on here: (1) is that there's a significant difference between the Yonge and Loeb translations of the sentence before the one we're referring to ("and seem rather for lessening the number of them" vs. "yet all the same look out for a plentiful supply of them," where Yonge and Loeb seem to be at odds, and

(2) the sentence that contrasts "birth position and rank" to beauty, age, and shape." (the Loeb version) on which point Yonge largely agrees, but the question is "what exactly are they talking about?"

XXXIII. You see, I imagine, how Epicurus has divided his kinds of desires, not very neatly 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 desire, his opinion is, that we may say easily either enjoy or go without them. And with regard to the third, since they are utterly frivolous, being neither fitted to necessity nor nature, he thinks that they should be entirely rooted out. On this topic a great many arguments are advanced by the Epicureans; and those pleasures which they do not despise as a body, they despise one by one, and seek rather for lessening the number of them; for so to restrain pleasures, on which subject they say a great deal, than say there are easy reasons, and within any man's reach; and they think that if nature requires them, they are not to be obtained by birth, position, or rank, but by shape, age, and person: and that it is by no means difficult

anything is required to satisfy the necessary pleasures for the stores of nature are available; and the second kind of desires is he thinks scarce hard to satisfy nor indeed hard to go without; the third kind he thought should be utterly rejected, because they were completely unnecessary, and so far from counting as necessary, had not any relation to nature either. At this point his disciples enter on a long argument, and those pleasures, which belong to kinds they despise, they belittle in detail, yet all the same look out for a plentiful supply of them. For inward pleasures upon which they dwell at length are, they say, easy to satisfy, general, within reach of all, and should restrain dressed them, the standard of value should, they think, not be birth, position or rank, but beauty, age, shape, and abstinence is by no means difficult at the call of either health or duty or reputation, and in general this kind of pleasures is desirable, should there be no obstacle, but is never of benefit. The