

Episode Sixty-Two - The Perils of Romantic Love (Part 2)

Post by "Cassius" of March 12, 2021 at 10:06 AM

Welcome to Episode Sixty-Two of Lucretius Today.

I am your host Cassius, and together with my panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book, "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

For anyone who is not familiar with our podcast, please check back to [Episode One](#) for a discussion of our goals and our ground rules. If you have any question about that, please be sure to contact us at EpicureanFriends.com for more information.

In this Episode 62 we will continue our discussion of perils of romantic love.

Our text today is Latin Lines -1141-1208 - of Book Four.

Munro Notes

1141-1191: if there are such evils in prosperous, what must be the evils of unsuccessful love? strive then not to fall into love; but if you are caught, use all efforts to escape : yet men stand in their own way, and deluded find beauties even in defects ; the discarded lover will refuse all comfort; who yet, if received back, will find out his folly and be glad to get away again.

1192 - 1208: yet women sometimes feel true love in return.

Browne 1743

These are the misfortunes that attend an amour ever so fortunate and constant; but the miseries of a wretched and disastrous love are innumerable, and obvious to everyone with his eyes open. You had better therefore be upon your guard beforehand, and observe the rules I have laid down to prevent your being caught; for 'tis not so difficult to avoid being drawn into the snares of love as to disengage yourself from the net when you are taken, and to break through the strong knots which Venus ties close upon all her votaries.

And though you are entangled and within the net, you may still avoid much of the evil, unless you willfully set yourself against the remedy. First then, you are to take no notice of any imperfections, either of mind or body, you find in the mistress you admire and fondly love. All

lovers, blinded by their passion, observe this, and attribute beauties to the fair to which they have no real pretence; and therefore the ugly and deformed we see have their several charms, and secure a sovereign power over their admirers. The lover that has such a forbidding Dowdy for a mistress is laughed at by his companions, who advise him to appease Venus and render her propitious, while they think nothing of their greater misfortunes in placing their esteem upon others less lovely and less beautiful. The black seems brown; the nasty and rank is negligent, the owl-eyed is a Pallas, the sinewy, with her dry skin, is a little Doe, the dwarf, of the Pygmy Breed, is one of the Graces, wit and spirit all over; the large and gigantic is surprising and full of majesty. If she stammers and cannot speak, then she lisps; she is modest if she is dumb; but the Turbulent, the violent and the talkative is all Fire. If she is worn away with a consumption, she is my Slender Love, you may span her in the waist if she is dying with a cough. The two-handed Virago, with her full Duggs, is Ceres herself, a bedfellow for Bacchus; the flat-nosed is my Silene, a little Satyr; the pouting lip is a very Kiss. It would be endless to say all that might be offered upon this subject.

But allow your mistress all the advantages of beauty in her face, that charms of love arise from every limb, yet there are others as lovely as she, and time was when you lived without her, and we know she plays the same game that homelier women can do as well. And then she perfumes, rank as she is with filthy smells, that her maids cannot come near her, but make a jest of her when they are not seen. But when the lover is shut out, and all in tears crowns the gates with flowers and garlands, and pours ointments upon the stately pillars, and the wretch warms the very doors with his kisses; yet when he is admitted, and one blast from her armpits strikes full upon him as he enters, he presently seeks for a plausible reason to be gone, and all his long-labored speeches of complaint are forgotten, and he condemns himself of folly for raising such ideas of her beauty, which no mortal could lay claim to. This secret is well known to women of the town, and they act cunningly behind the scenes as it were, and conceal their failings from those whose love they would secure fixed and lasting to themselves. But all to no purpose, for you may easily imagine how things are, and discover all, and prevent their utmost endeavors to deceive you. And if your mistress be of an open temper, and not sullen and reserved, she will not so much as hide her defects, but hope you will allow for imperfections that are common to the whole sex.

Nor does the woman always breathe with feigned desire when joined in strict embrace with him she loves, when she holds him close, and on his pressed lips imprints her balmy kisses; for she often does it heartily, and strives to share the common joy, and run the heats with vigor to the goal. Nor for any other reason would birds and herds and wild beasts and cattle and mares bear the weight of the male if they did not burn and rage with equal heat, and so receive with joy the lusty leap. Don't you observe how those whom mutual pleasure has bound fast are tortured as it were in common bonds? How dogs in the street are striving to untie the knot and pull with all their might a different way, yet they stick fast in the strong ties of love? This they would never do if not engaged in mutual joys, which cheat them with delight and hold them fast. The pleasure then is common to them both.

And these evils are found in love that is lasting and highly prosperous; but in crossed and hopeless love are ills such as you may seize with closed eyes, past numbering; so that it is better to watch before-hand in the manner I have prescribed, and be on your guard not to be drawn in. For to avoid falling into the toils of love is not so hard as, after you are caught, to get out of the nets you are in and to break through the strong meshes of Venus. And yet even when you are entangled and held fast you may escape the mischief, unless you stand in your own way and begin by overlooking all the defects of her mind or those of her body, whoever it is whom you court and woo. For this men usually do, blinded by passion, and attribute to the beloved those advantages which are not really theirs. We therefore see women in ways manifold deformed and ugly to be objects of endearment and held in the highest admiration.

And one lover jeers at others and advises them to propitiate Venus, since they are troubled by a disgraceful passion, and often, poor wretch, gives no thought to his own ills greatest of all. The black is a brune, the filthy and rank has not the love of order; the cat-eyed is a miniature Pallas, the stringy and wizened a gazelle; the dumpy and dwarfish is one of the graces, from top to toe all grace; the big and overgrown is awe-inspiring and full of dignity. She is tongue-tied, cannot speak, then she has a lisp; the dumb is bashful; then the fire-spit, the teasing, the gossiping turns to a shining lamp. One becomes a slim darling then when she cannot live from want of flesh; and she is only spare, who is half-dead with cough. Then the fat and big-breasted is a Ceres' self big-breasted from Iacchus; the pug-nosed is a she Silenus and a satyress; the thick-lipped a very kiss. It were tedious to attempt to report other things of the kind.

Let her however be of ever so great dignity of appearance; such that the power of Venus goes forth from all her limbs; yet there are others too; yet have we lived without her before; yet does she do, and we know that she does, in all things the same as the ugly woman; and fumigates herself, poor wretch, with nauseous perfumes, her very maids running from her and giggling behind her back. But the lover, when shut out, often in tears covers the threshold with flowers and wreaths, and anoints the haughty doorposts with oil of marjoram; and imprints kisses, poor wretch, on the doors. When however he has been admitted, if on his approach but one single breath should come in his way, he would seek specious reasons for departing, and the long-conned deep drawn complaint would fall to the ground; and then he would blame his folly on seeing that he had attributed to her more than it is right to concede to a mortal. Nor is this unknown to our Venuses; wherefore all the more they themselves hide with the utmost pains all that goes on behind the scenes of life from those whom they wish to retain in the chains of love; but in vain, since you may yet draw forth from her mind into the light all these things and search into all her smiles; and if she is of a fair mind and not troublesome, overlook them in your turn and make allowance for human failings.

Nor does the woman sigh always with feigned passion, when she locks in her embrace and joins with her body the man's body and holds it, sucking his lips into her lips and drinking in his kisses. Often she does it from the heart, and seeking mutual joys courts him to run the

complete race of love. And in no other way could birds, cattle, wild beasts, sheep and mares submit to bear the males, except because the very exuberance of nature in the females is in heat and burns and joyously draws in the Venus of the covering males. See you not too how those whom mutual pleasure has chained are often tortured in their common chains? How often in the highways do dogs, desiring to separate, eagerly pull different ways with all their might, while all the time they are held fast in the strong fetters of Venus! This they would never do, unless they experienced mutual joys strong enough to force them into the snare and hold them in its meshes. Wherefore again and again I repeat there is a common pleasure.

Bailey 1921

And these ills are found in love that is true and fully prosperous; but when love is crossed and hopeless there are ills, which you might detect even with closed eyes, ills without number; so that it is better to be on the watch beforehand, even as I have taught you, and to beware that you be not entrapped. For to avoid being drawn into the meshes of love, is not so hard a task as when caught amid the toils to issue out and break through the strong bonds of Venus. And yet even when trammelled and fettered you might escape the snare, unless you still stand in your own way, and at the first o'erlook all the blemishes of mind and body in her, whom you seek and woo. For for the most part men act blinded by passion, and assign to women excellencies which are not truly theirs. And so we see those in many ways deformed and ugly dearly loved, yea, prospering in high favour.

And one man laughs at another, and urges him to appease Venus, since he is wallowing in a base passion, yet often, poor wretch, he cannot see his own ills, far greater than the rest. A black love is called 'honey-dark', the foul and filthy 'unadorned', the green-eyed 'Athena's image', the wiry and wooden 'a gazelle', the squat and dwarfish 'one of the graces', 'all pure delight', the lumpy and ungainly 'a wonder', and 'full of majesty'. She stammers and cannot speak, 'she has a lisp'; the dumb is 'modest'; the fiery, spiteful gossip is 'a burning torch'. One becomes a 'slender darling', when she can scarce live from decline; another half dead with cough is 'frail'. Then the fat and full-bosomed is 'Ceres' self with Bacchus at breast'; the snub-nosed is 'sister to Silenus, or a Satyr'; the thick-lipped is 'a living kiss'. More of this sort it were tedious for me to try to tell.

But yet let her be fair of face as you will, and from her every limb let the power of Venus issue forth: yet surely there are others too: surely we have lived without her before, surely she does just the same in all things, and we know it, as the ugly, and of herself, poor wretch, reeks of noisome smells, and her maids flee far from her and giggle in secret. But the tearful lover, denied entry, often smothers the threshold with flowers and garlands, and anoints the haughty door-posts with marjoram, and plants his kisses, poor wretch, upon the doors; yet if, admitted at last, one single breath should meet him as he comes, he would seek some honest pretext to be gone, and the deep-drawn lament long-planned would fall idle, and then and there he would curse his folly, because he sees that he has assigned more to her than it is right to grant to any mortal. Nor is this unknown to our queens of love; nay the more are they at pains to hide all

behind the scenes from those whom they wish to keep fettered in love; all for naught, since you can even so by thought bring it all to light and seek the cause of all this laughter, and if she is of a fair mind, and not spiteful, o'erlook faults in your turn, and pardon human weaknesses.

Nor does the woman sigh always with feigned love, when clasping her lover she holds him fast, showering her kisses. For often she does it from the heart, and yearning for mutual joys she woos him to reach the goal of love. And in no other way would birds, cattle, wild beasts, the flocks, and mares be able to submit to the males, except because their nature too is afire, and is burning to overflow. Do you not see too how those whom mutual pleasure has bound, are often tortured in their common chains? Wherefore, again and again, as I say, the pleasure is common.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 13, 2021 at 5:13 PM

Plato's *Phaedrus* deals with love as far as I can tell. I've just scanned the first few pages, which discuss how the "non-lover" is better than the "lover." Presumably Epicurus and then Lucretius were reacting to this work in some way.... 🤔

Post by “Cassius” of March 13, 2021 at 7:49 PM

Godfrey has reminded us that we need to keep in mind a comparison of Lucretius's commentary on this subject with Plato's views --- which he says may be in *Phaedrus*, but unfortunately I don't know much about his views beyond the generic definition of "Platonic love" [RE: Episode Sixty-One - The Perils of Romantic Love \(Part 1\)](#)

I'll see if i can find some basic info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonic_love

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonic_love

Platonic love (often lower-cased as platonic love)^[1] is a type of [love](#) that is not sexual. It is named after [Greek philosopher Plato](#), though the philosopher never used the term himself. Platonic love as devised by Plato concerns rising through levels of closeness to wisdom and true beauty from carnal attraction to individual bodies to attraction to souls, and eventually, union with the truth. This is the ancient, philosophical interpretation. Platonic love is examined in Plato's dialogue, the *Symposium*, which has as its topic the subject of love, or more generally

the subject of Eros. It explains the possibilities of how the feeling of love began and how it has evolved, both sexually and non-sexually, and defines genuine platonic love as inspiring a person's mind and soul and directing their attention towards spiritual matters. Of particular importance is the speech of Socrates, who attributes to the prophetess Diotima an idea of platonic love as a means of ascent to contemplation of the divine, an ascent is known as the "Ladder of Love". For Diotima and Plato generally, the most correct use of love of human beings is to direct one's mind to love of divinity. Socrates defines love based on separate classifications of pregnancy (to bear offspring); pregnancy of the body, pregnancy of the soul, and direct connection to existence. Pregnancy of the body results in human children. Pregnancy of the soul, the next step in the process, produces "virtue"—which is the soul (truth) translating itself into material form.[3] "... virtue for the Greeks means self-sameness ... in Plato's terms, Being or idea."(106)[3] Eros Pausanias, in Plato's Symposium (181b–182a), defines two types of the love known as "Eros": vulgar Eros, or earthly love, and divine Eros, or divine love. Pausanias defines vulgar Eros as material attraction towards a person's beauty for the purposes of physical pleasure and reproduction, and divine Eros as starting from physical attraction but transcending gradually to love for supreme beauty, placed on a similar level to the divine. This concept of divine Eros was later transformed into the term "platonic love". Vulgar Eros and divine Eros were both considered to be connected, and part of the same continuous process of pursuing perfection of one's being,[4] with the purpose of mending one's human nature and eventually reaching a point of unity where there is no longer an aspiration or need to change.[5] "Eros is ... a moment of transcendence ... in so far as the other can never be possessed without being annihilated in its status as the other, at which point both desire and transcendence would cease ...

Post by “Cassius” of March 14, 2021 at 9:55 PM

Episode 62 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. In today's episode, our second on the "romantic love" section of Book IV, we cover several techniques recommended by Lucretius for avoiding the pitfalls of romantic love while still experiencing the pleasures. Please let us know if you have comments or questions in the thread below, or at the permanent link here: We will be covering this topic for the next several weeks, so please be sure to let us know if you have any comments or questions, and we will try to address them over the next several episodes.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/43889554>

Post by “Cassius” of March 15, 2021 at 5:51 AM

As we continue to review the end of Book IV, I would appreciate everyone's help in considering the following:

A. Possibly the biggest obstacle to greater adoption of Epicurean philosophy by young people / people in the prime of life is the dominant view that "absence of pain" means that an Epicurean primarily runs from pain rather than pursues pleasure.

B. Romantic love is of greater intense interest to people than most any other subject.

C. The end of Book 4 clearly and forcefully makes the point that it is natural to pursue intense pleasure, and that Epicurus' advice is not to give up pleasure for the sake of experiencing no pain, but to pursue pleasure wisely so as to enjoy the pleasure (if you deem that pleasure worthwhile) without unnecessary pain.

D. This example and arguments at the end of Book 4 show in dramatic terms that the dominant interpretation of Epicurus is wrong.

E. Therefore a program of explaining Epicurean philosophy through its position on sex/romantic love would be one of the most effective ways of dealing with the biggest obstacle to wider adoption of Epicurean philosophy.

Would anyone question the proposition "that Epicurus' advice is not to give up pleasure for the sake of experiencing no pain, but to pursue pleasure wisely so as to enjoy the pleasure (if you deem that pleasure worthwhile) without unnecessary pain"?

Post by "Cassius" of March 15, 2021 at 10:29 AM

Actually if I were being really thoughtful about the idea of focusing a program of some type on Epicurean perspectives on Romantic Love, the format would not be so much an "advice column," but instead some kind of general commentary / outline of topics / commonly confronted questions. That way a structured program could be set up around an outline of common issues or commonly asked questions, such as, for only one example, what we mentioned in this episode, the question of proper perspectives on "soul-mates."

Post by "Cassius" of March 17, 2021 at 9:07 AM

Just for purposes of thinking ahead, I see that this coming weekend (3/21) we will reach the end of book 4, and we'll probably want to recap the general theme on the "love" passages. Please think about whether there are any summary points we ought to cover and let us know in the thread. I will set up the text later today. Here are Munro's notes on the remaining topics, which he makes pretty clear are probably united by the theme that it isn't divine gods that take the lead in these issues:

1209-1232: according as the seed of the man or woman prevails at conception, the child is more like to the one or to the other; and this is so whether the child be male or female.

1233-1277: it is not the gods who grant or withhold offspring: conception depends on the due assortment of man and wife.

1278-1287: often by her own virtues, from no divine interposition, a woman without personal attractions will endear herself to her husband.

Post by “Matthaios” of March 22, 2021 at 10:04 AM

I recall the Buddhist meditations on the "decaying body" part. I did find that as a young man, it was not very successful (overwhelming sex-drive), but as an older man, it could be more effective and perhaps it has helped.

Also, where once I would beat myself up over missing an opportunity with a woman, thinking she could have been "the one", as I've aged, I no longer care, and almost feel fortunate to avoid an entanglement, and being aware that a new desire could be right around the corner, thus having let "one" go, no longer causes any grief.

I can't help but notice a lot of links between some of the Epicurean views and mgtow views of the present. I have seen this mgtow (men going their own way) movement grow over the years, and some of its common teachings is to be wary of romantic entrapments, and to focus on self-improvement that leads to greater pleasures down the years. I'm not sure how much longer Epicurean romance views could stand as an impediment for bringing youth to the philosophy, because I've noticed that this mgtow line of thinking is spreading like wildfire with young adults, to the point that these coming years will see interesting social dynamics taking place.

Calling a man a SIMP is a "shaming" tactic used by men to in a sense, tell them to stop putting women on a pedestal. Basically doing things for women out of traditional cultural norms of which gains little to no benefit for the modern man himself in the climate of equality. I have seen this term used within the mgtow community. Examples can vary widely in extremes, from a man paying off a woman's student loan debt and/or raising another mans child, all the way to

paying for a woman's dinner or even holding a door. Other examples I've seen are men intervening in violent disputes on behalf of a female stranger, or other life risky behaviors. Those men would be called SIMPs by a particular male community, while the mainstream and perhaps females would see them as "heroes", as they stand to benefit from this type of behavior by male strangers.

I could imagine a Lucretius making the point that one shouldn't focus on "romance/lust" as the primary component to a relationship, though important, it is fleeting, therefore better to look at what a contract would provide, ie offspring, wealth, safety, history, familiarity, etc.. Where once relationships were treated as more of a business transaction to offer improved outcomes for future generations and a securing of generational wealth, modern day relationships have run wild with temporary lust and desires, of which when the flame dims out, have often left behind divorced marriages and broken families.

On one of Elayne's comments of men having power over women during Roman times and not needing to use sex as a tool for manipulation, wasn't there a very high percentage of men that were slaves, who would not have held power over free women? And to mention female Roman citizens versus male non-Roman citizens. Though I don't have any exact historical references other than some historical fiction books I've read, as well as the "Spartacus" TV series.

Post by "Cassius" of March 22, 2021 at 11:26 AM

Thanks for the comments Matthaïos - I particularly agree with this:

[Quote from Matthaïos](#)

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Your list of considerations is a good one, since once conclusion I am coming to is that "time" or "duration" of the pleasure is what most people think about first, but that's not really the consideration (or at least, it's only one) according to Epicurus.

Quote

And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant. (Letter to Menoceus)

Post by “Don” of March 23, 2021 at 10:01 PM

I finally had the chance to listen to the entire episode. I agree this is an important practical topic. Lucretius's focus on a men's perspective primarily is simply because it was a very patriarchal society. His deciding to talk about women enjoying sex at all is a revolutionary idea for his time.

I also generally agree with Elayne's brief comment near the end on women's status in ancient Roman society. In fact, women were always going to be under the control of a male guardian. Male slaves could at least have the possibility of buying or winning their freedom. The pater familias, the oldest male in the household, literally had life and death control over all the members of the household. The women of ancient Greece had their lives even more circumscribed.

Ancient Greek and Roman women could only exercise any influence solely through the men in their lives. If they could get men to listen to them only by feigning to enjoy sex with them, more power to them. They had to be resourceful.

The hetairai of ancient Greece had it both better and worse than most women. From what I remember reading, they had no recourse if a roaming band of drunken men tried to break into their house to demand sex. There are stories of men trying to burn doors down because they felt entitled even after being turned away for being rude, drunk, and disorderly. I've read the hetairai were often more free and cultured than married women, but at the cost of their security. They were expected to entertain men, engage them in high-level conversation at symposia, and also be available for sex. Some hetairai were long-term companions of particular men (e.g., Pericles and Aspasia)

On a slight tangent: To get a woman's perspective on Ancient Greece in an entertaining and poignant fashion, I highly recommend Natalie Haynes recent novel *A Thousand Ships*. This is a retelling of the Trojan War from the perspective of all the women and goddesses mentioned in Homer and other sources. Haynes does an amazing job narrating the audiobook, too! It was an eye-opening experience listening to it.

Post by “Joshua” of March 24, 2021 at 9:48 PM

To illustrate Don's point, a little thought experiment; how many male names could I produce from the ancient world off the top of my head? Easily a hundred. How many women? Thinking now, I start to struggle after five or six. And how many of those are duly famous in their own right? Sappho...Hypatia...Cleopatra...

Post by “Don” of March 24, 2021 at 10:27 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

To illustrate Don's point, a little thought experiment; how many male names could I produce from the ancient world off the top of my head? Easily a hundred. How many women? Thinking now, I start to struggle after five or six. And how many of those are duly famous in their own right? Sappho...Hypatia...Cleopatra...

And how many names would be actual women and how many would be mythological or legendary?