

Episode Ninety-Seven - The Virtues as Instrumental For Pleasure: Temperance and Courage

Post by "Cassius" of November 15, 2021 at 7:39 PM

Welcome to Episode Ninety-Seven of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and we'll 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.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

At this point in our podcast we have completed our first line-by-line review of the poem, and we have turned to the presentation of Epicurean ethics found in Cicero's On Ends. Today we continue with that material starting with line forty-seven, and we have Charles back with us for the discussion.

Now let's join the panel with Martin reading today's text:

[47] And on the same principles we shall assert that even temperance is not desirable for its own sake, but because it brings quiet to our hearts and soothes them and appeases them by a kind of harmony. Temperance is in truth the virtue which warns us to follow reason in dealing with the objects of desire or repugnance. Nor indeed is it enough to resolve what we are to do or omit, but we should also abide by our resolve. Most men, however, being unable to uphold and maintain a determination they have themselves made, are overmastered and enervated when the image of pleasure is thrust before their eyes, and surrender themselves to be bound by the chain of their lusts, nor do they foresee what the issue will be, and so for the sake of some paltry and needless pleasure, which would be procured by other means if they chose, and with which they might dispense and yet not suffer pain, rush sometimes into grievous diseases, sometimes into ruin, sometimes into disgrace, and often even become subject to the penalties imposed by the statutes and the courts.

[48] Men however whose aim is so to enjoy their pleasures that no pains may ensue in consequence of them, and who retain their own judgment, which prevents them from succumbing to pleasure and doing things which they feel should not be done, these achieve the greatest amount of pleasure by neglecting pleasure. Such men actually often suffer pain, fearing that, if they do not, they may incur greater pain. From these reflections it is easily understood that intemperance on the one hand is not repugnant in and for itself, and on the other that temperance is an object of desire, not because it flees from pleasures, but because it is followed by greater pleasures.

[49] XV. The same principles will be found to apply to courage; for neither the performance of work nor the suffering of pain is in itself attractive, nor yet endurance, nor diligence, nor watchings nor much-praised industry itself, no, nor courage either, but we devote ourselves to all such things for the purpose of passing our life in freedom from anxiety and alarm, and of emancipating both mind and body, so far as we can succeed in doing so, from annoyance. As in truth, on the one hand, the entire stability of a peaceful life is shaken by the fear of death, and it is wretched to succumb to pains and to bear them in an abject and feeble spirit, and many have through such weakness of mind brought ruin on their parents, many on their friends and some on their country, so on the other hand a strong and exalted spirit is free from all solicitude and torment, as it thinks lightly of death, which brings those who are subject to it into the same state they were in before they were born, and such a spirit is so disciplined to encounter pains that it recalls how the most severe of them are terminated by death, while the slighter grant many seasons of rest, and those which lie between these two classes are under our control, so that if we find them endurable, we may tolerate them, if otherwise, we may with an unruffled mind make our exit from life, when we find it disagreeable, as we would from a theater. These facts enable us to see that cowardice and weakness are not blamed, nor courage and endurance applauded, for what they are in themselves, but that the former qualities are spurned, because productive of pain, while the latter are sought, because productive of pleasure.

[50] XVI. Justice still is left to complete our statement concerning the whole of virtue, but considerations nearly similar may be urged. Just as I have proved wisdom, temperance and courage to be linked with pleasure, so that they cannot possibly by any means be sundered or severed from it, so we must deem of justice, which not only never injures any person, but on the contrary always produces some benefit, not solely by reason of its own power and constitution, whereby it calms our minds, but also by inspiring hope that we shall lack none of the objects which nature when uncorrupted craves. And as recklessness and caprice and cowardice always torture the mind and always bring unrest and tumult, so if wickedness has established itself in a man's mind, the mere fact of its presence causes tumult; if moreover it has carried out any deed, however secretly it may have acted, yet it will never feel a trust, that the action will always remain concealed. In most cases the acts of wicked men are at first dogged by suspicion, then by talk and rumour, then by the prosecutor, then by the judge; many have actually informed against themselves, as in your own consulship.

[51] But if there are any who seem to themselves to be sufficiently barricaded and fortified against all privity on the part of their fellow men, still they tremble before the privity of the gods, and imagine that the very cares by which their minds are devoured night and day are imposed upon them, with a view to their punishment, by the eternal gods. Again, from wicked acts what new influence can accrue tending to the diminution of annoyances, equal to that which tends to their increase, not only from consciousness of the actions themselves, but also from legal penalties and the hatred of the community? And yet some men exhibit no moderation in money-making, or office, or military command, or wantonness, or gluttony, or the remaining passions, which are not lessened but rather intensified by the trophies of wickedness, so that such persons seem fit to be repressed rather than to be taught their error.

[52] True reason beckons men of properly sound mind to pursue justice, fairness and honor; nor are acts of injustice advantageous to a man without eloquence or influence, who cannot easily succeed in what he attempts, nor maintain his success if he wins it, and large resources either of wealth or of talent suit better with a generous spirit, for those who exhibit this spirit attract to themselves goodwill and affection, which is very well calculated to ensure a peaceful life; and this is the truer in that men have no reason for sinning.

[53] For the passions which proceed from nature are easily satisfied without committing any wrong; while we must not succumb to those which are groundless, since they yearn for nothing worthy of our craving, and more loss is involved in the mere fact of wrong doing, than profit in the results which are produced by the wrong doing. So one would not be right in describing even justice as a thing to be wished for on its own account, but rather because it brings with it a very large amount of agreeableness. For to be the object of esteem and affection is agreeable just because it renders life safer and more replete with pleasures. Therefore we think that wickedness should be shunned, not alone on account of the disadvantages which fall to the lot of the wicked, but much rather because when it pervades a man's soul it never permits him to breathe freely or to rest.

[54] But if the encomium passed even on the virtues themselves, over which the eloquence of all other philosophers especially runs riot, can find no vent unless it be referred to pleasure, and pleasure is the only thing which invites us to the pursuit of itself, and attracts us by reason of its own nature, then there can be no doubt that of all things good it is the supreme and ultimate good, and that a life of happiness means nothing else but a life attended by pleasure.

Post by “Joshua” of November 21, 2021 at 11:16 AM

I brought up Boccaccio and his *De Mulieribus Claris*, or *Concerning Famous Women*. In one chapter he talks about the life of the Epicurean Leontion, where he chastises her for

demonstrating a perfect lack of "feminine virtues".

I earlier wrote a reply to Boccaccio, which I will copy here:

To Boccaccio: A Rebuke

I mark it, sir, and wonder at it dully,
To find the lady's name maligned so fully
On evidence begot anecdotally;
A pond'rous load to hang by such a pulley!
Was our Leontium so fierce a bully,
Who sent him off peripatetically
Pouting, old Theophrastus; when her volley
Charmed a grudging kindness out of Tully?
And have *you*, sir, the gall to say she sullied?
Who scattered bastards all across Italy!

Post by "Cassius" of November 26, 2021 at 12:26 AM

Editing is coming along on this one and it should be up by midday Friday, followed shortly by Joshua's full recording of the Torquatus text from On Ends. I think I will first post that to my account at Archive.org so it has a separate home that is easy to find, with a separate discussion thread here, rather than simply include it as a regular podcast episode.

Post by "Don" of November 26, 2021 at 6:33 AM

Archive.org is a great idea! Big fan!
What else do you have in your account?

Post by “Cassius” of November 26, 2021 at 6:40 AM

I think I have some old recordings made by text to speech, but I don't recall. I definitely want to put our full podcast series there too as a more permanent place for it.

Post by “Cassius” of November 26, 2021 at 2:15 PM

Episode Ninety-Seven of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. In this episode we continue our examination of the virtues as instrumental for pleasure, with the focus this week on "temperance" and courage.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/47670385>

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 8, 2021 at 1:07 PM

Listened to this last night. Some thoughts, and then some obvious words of advice:

For me the word "temperance" brings up the idea of abstinence from alcohol (the U.S. Temperance Movement). The word "prudence" works better for me. As for "moderation" the online dictionary definition is "the avoidance of excess or extremes". Moderation is necessary in meal portion sizes, sugar/carb intake, and alcohol. The pains of over consumption feel unpleasant. Moderation leads to a more enjoyable life. Sugar and alcohol are best in smaller quantities, with an exception for rare special occasions (as long as one "paces oneself").

As for the habit of using food to self-soothe, moderation is a necessary virtue. It would be prudent to find an alternative to using food for self-soothing. Also make sure not to buy binge-inducing snack foods, and instead buy more fresh fruits to eat...Desire that which is good for you.

Regarding wine consumption in Ancient Greece, I found this on wikipedia:

Quote

The poet Eubulus noted that three bowls (kylikes) were the ideal amount of wine to consume. The quantity of three bowls to represent moderation is a recurring theme

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2254-episode-ninety-seven-the-virtues-as-instrumental-for-pleasure-temperance-and-cou/>

throughout Greek writing (today, the standard 750 ml bottle contains roughly three to six glasses of wine, depending on serving size).[1] In his c. 375 BC play Semele or Dionysus, Eubulus has Dionysus say:

"Three bowls do I mix for the temperate: one to health, which they empty first; the second to love and pleasure; the third to sleep. When this bowl is drunk up, wise guests go home. The fourth bowl is ours no longer, but belongs to violence; the fifth to uproar; the sixth to drunken revel; the seventh to black eyes; the eighth is the policeman's; the ninth belongs to biliousness; and the tenth to madness and the hurling of furniture."

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece_and_wine

Post by "Godfrey" of December 8, 2021 at 2:05 PM

Nice find!

Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2021 at 2:17 PM

I don't mean this to be arguing with Kalosyni in any way but the quote (which is a good find) seems to me to be very helpful in explaining my contrarian view:

Quote

The poet Eubulus noted that three bowls (kylikes) were the ideal amount of wine to consume. The quantity of three bowls to represent moderation is a recurring theme throughout Greek writing (today, the standard 750 ml bottle contains roughly three to six glasses of wine, depending on serving size).[1] In his c. 375 BC play Semele or Dionysus, Eubulus has Dionysus say:

"Three bowls do I mix for the temperate: one to health, which they empty first; the second to love and pleasure; the third to sleep. When this bowl is drunk up, wise guests go home. The fourth bowl is ours no longer, but belongs to violence; the fifth to uproar; the sixth to drunken revel; the seventh to black eyes; the eighth is the policeman's; the ninth belongs to biliousness; and the tenth to madness and the hurling of furniture."

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These guys are fooling no one but themselves if they think that there is an ideal of "moderation" or "ideal quantity" that has some absolute value separate from circumstances that can be referenced by referring to "moderation" in and of itself. Instead, what there is in place of that is always a quantity that makes sense based on context, which varies by fact. In this case, the proper quantity varies with things like the weight of the drinker, their built-up tolerance to alcohol, and other aspects of bodily chemistry that varies by individual. Sure you can generalize that "most people" are going to fall within certain variable limits, but that is further evidence that circumstances determine the result, not some pre-defined concept of "moderation" or "temperance" or any other similar word that comes to mind.

The other virtues are subject to the same qualification and limitation, but "temperance" or "moderation" seems to me to have not even a veneer of common sense about it. In fact it's almost a vice in itself - to look to some kind of predefined quantity rather than the right quantity that is desirable under the circumstances.

The more I think about it, I will repeat, the more I think this concern applies to all of the virtues, but I think I've seen this one praised casually too many times on facebook by Aristotelians and the supporters of the standard establishment Greek philosophers to consider it more charitably



But I do think Goldwater had it very wrong too -- you wouldn't want to be or to praise "extremism" any more than you would want to be "moderate" - both are predefined reactionary perspectives divorced from the circumstances.

If it were me it would be more like "*Vigor in the pursuit of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice no virtue.*"

Post by "Don" of December 8, 2021 at 3:25 PM

I don't find "temperance" in Epicurus's writings. Is it mentioned anywhere other than by "Torquatus"?

Post by "Cassius" of December 8, 2021 at 4:12 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I don't find "temperance" in Epicurus's writings. Is it mentioned anywhere other than by "Torquatus"?

Great question and if we can't find it at all then that is good evidence in itself.

Post by "Don" of December 8, 2021 at 7:25 PM

The qualities of the sweet life in the PDs and the letter to Menoikeus are:

φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως

wisely

nobly

justly

If someone sees temperance, let me know.

I think this also dovetails with what I *think* [Kalosyni](#) was saying about wisdom and making wise decisions. The ability to make wise choices is basically part of self-control which is potentially more helpful than being "moderate"...?

Post by "Kalosyni" of December 8, 2021 at 10:50 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

These guys are fooling no one but themselves if they think that there is an ideal of "moderation" or "ideal quantity" that has some absolute value separate from circumstances that can be referenced by referring to "moderation" in and of itself. Instead, what there is in place of that is always a quantity that makes sense based on context, which varies by fact. In this case, the proper quantity varies with things like the weight of the drinker, their built-up tolerance to alcohol, and other aspects of bodily chemistry that varies by individual.

Yes, I agree with you. There isn't a set quantity that can be applied to everyone.

I thought the quote from the play was kind of funny. But then thought about it after posting it...how odd that the third bowl leads to sleep, but the fourth one to violence. Seems a little extreme. Now most people in modern times know how to hold their public drinking in check, since it's both unsafe and against the law to drive drunk.

I think moderation is an important skill, but I don't think of it as a virtue. I think of it as a helpful tool. It's simply an internal knowing, an internal wisdom, that you learn with trial and error...for what feels best inside your own body. Every body has to learn it for themselves, by being fully present to what feels good vs. what feels bad. So over time paying attention and moving toward what feels good.

Post by “Cassius” of December 9, 2021 at 6:45 AM

This conversation reminds me of a euphemism that was popular in the past for companies that wanted to fire large numbers of people without admitting what they were doing - they would call it "right-sizing." That's pretty much how I see anything good that exists in the term "moderation" - as meaning selecting whatever quantity that produces the most beneficial result under the circumstances.

Post by “Don” of December 9, 2021 at 7:27 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Now most people in modern times know how to hold their public drinking in check, since it's both unsafe and against the law to drive drunk.

Many people can exercise wisdom and personal responsibility*; unfortunately, it's still a problem:

[Alcohol Facts and Statistics | National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\)](#)

In 2019, alcohol-impaired driving fatalities accounted for 10,142 deaths (28.0 percent of overall driving fatalities).

*PS: In rereading that, I realize that comes off as too harsh in relation to those suffering from alcoholism. That was not intended. Mea culpa. However, not all alcohol overindulgence is due to

alcoholism and some is due to just poor choices.

PPS: Just posted link to new podcast episode from The Next Big Idea on this very topic.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 10, 2021 at 12:41 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I don't find "temperance" in Epicurus's writings. Is it mentioned anywhere other than by "Torquatus"?

It is implied by this:

"And Diocles, in the third book of his Overview, says that they all lived in the most simple and economical manner; "They were content," says he, "with a small cup of light wine, and all the rest of their drink was water." -- Diogenes Laertius : Life of Epicurus

Post by “Don” of December 10, 2021 at 3:17 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

a small cup of light wine

Thanks for that!

I find it interesting that that phrase above is the word οινιδιον oinidion which is just a diminutive of "wine" οίνος oinos. Plus it appears to only show up in a couple places with some inscriptions and that one mention in DL book X being most of them.

PS. Diminutives: "Ancient Greek suffixes that are derived from a base word to convey endearment, small size or small intensity." (Wiktionary)

So, with so few attested usages of οινιδιον, it's hard to say what is actually being conveyed. I've seen some articles that say diminutives were sometimes just alternative forms of the word, οινιδιον just could have meant "wine." I've also seen some translators use "inferior wine" but I see no reason why Epicureans would choose inferior wine. Some possibilities from the Wiktionary definition to me could be:

- endearment: precious or favorite wine. They had a particularly favorite vintage or supplier.
- small size: They drank small cups, but that doesn't seem noteworthy. It also doesn't address the beverage. You'd think there would be a mention of the cup but it's not; it's the beverage (juxtaposed with water)
- small intensity: This one makes the most sense to me. The wine typically drunk in the Garden was less potent, maybe not fermented as long, maybe with more water added (as was common) especially since water is also mentioned next. So maybe the passage is getting at the idea that some added a "little wine" to their water and others just stuck with the plain spring water or rain water.

The mixing of wine and water goes back way into the history of Ancient Greece, mentioned even in the Odyssey (1.110):

[110] some were mixing wine and water for them in bowls, others again were washing the tables with porous sponges and setting them forth, while still others were portioning out meats in abundance.

What Telemachus greets Athena with soon after that excerpt strikes me as almost a version of the greeting posted at the entrance to the Garden:

"Hail, stranger; in our house thou shalt find entertainment and then, when thou hast tasted food, thou shalt tell of what thou hast need."

[Homer, Odyssey, Book 1, line 80](#)