

Episode One Hundred Two - Corollaries to the Doctrines - Part Two

Post by "Cassius" of December 25, 2021 at 9:42 AM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Two 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 examine a number of important corollaries of Epicurean doctrine.

Now let's join (Charles or Joshua) reading today's text:

[56] By this time so much at least is plain, that the intensest pleasure or the intensest annoyance felt in the mind exerts more influence on the happiness or wretchedness of life than either feeling, when present for an equal space of time in the body. We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain.

[57] But as we are elated by the blessings to which we look forward, so we delight in those which we call to memory. Fools however are tormented by the recollection of misfortunes; wise men rejoice in keeping fresh the thankful recollection of their past blessings. Now it is in the power of our wills to bury our adversity in almost unbroken forgetfulness, and to agreeably and sweetly remind ourselves of our prosperity. But when we look with penetration and concentration of thought upon things that are past, then, if those things are bad, grief usually

ensues, if good, joy.

XVIII. What a noble and open and plain and straight avenue to a happy life! It being certain that nothing can be better for man than to be relieved of all pain and annoyance, and to have full enjoyment of the greatest pleasures both of mind and of body, do you not see how nothing is neglected which assists our life more easily to attain that which is its aim, the supreme good? Epicurus, the man whom you charge with being an extravagant devotee of pleasures, cries aloud that no one can live agreeably unless he lives a wise, moral and righteous life, and that no one can live a wise, moral and righteous life without living agreeably.

[58] It is not possible for a community to be happy when there is rebellion, nor for a house when its masters are at strife; much less can a mind at disaccord and at strife with itself taste any portion of pleasure undefiled and unimpeded. Nay more, if the mind is always beset by desires and designs which are recalcitrant and irreconcilable, it can never see a moment's rest or a moment's peace.

[59] But if agreeableness of life is thwarted by the more serious bodily diseases, how much more must it inevitably be thwarted by the diseases of the mind! Now the diseases of the mind are the measureless and false passions for riches, fame, power and even for the lustful pleasures. To these are added griefs, troubles, sorrows, which devour the mind and wear it away with anxiety, because men do not comprehend that no pain should be felt in the mind, which is unconnected with an immediate or impending bodily pain. Nor indeed is there among fools any one who is not sick with some one of these diseases; there is none therefore who is not wretched.

[60] There is also death which always hangs over them like the stone over Tantalus, and again superstition, which prevents those who are tinged by it from ever being able to rest. Moreover they have no memories for their past good fortune, and no enjoyment of their present; they only wait for what is to come, and as this cannot but be uncertain, they are wasted with anguish and alarm; and they are tortured most of all when they become conscious, all too late, that their devotion to wealth or military power, or influence, or fame has been entirely in vain. For they achieve none of the pleasures which they ardently hoped to obtain and so underwent numerous and severe exertions.

Post by "Alex" of December 25, 2021 at 8:55 PM

Hi Cassius,

I am one of your listeners who expect the podcast edition at least once a week, as you mentioned.

So it's great that you and the panel keep going with refreshing debates, referring to other philosophers/authors like Cicero and Torquato. I do enjoy the participation of regular panellists; Joshua added an interesting view on Utopia for example.

Perhaps, my next step should be Prof DeWitt's book, and searching for more information I came across another book that took my attention. By the way, I'd like to post a question to you and the panellists about it.

The book is Facing death: Epicurus and his critics, by James Warren. According to a brief description, it's about death related to the epicurean interpretation. I thought it can be interesting to read it right now, after two years of pandemics. However, there's something in the description that doesn't convince me, I am not quite sure.

It's an expensive book, so I may be better off buying DeWitt's instead. You can check the description in the link, [Facing Death: Epicurus and his Critics a book by James \(Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge\) Warren. \(bookshop.org\)](#)

Here's the question for you, Joshua, Martin and Don, please. Can you expand on Warren's book? Are you aware of this work? Did you recommend it already? What do you reckon? Is it worth spending money on it, or not at all?

Thank you for your suggestions!

Post by “Joshua” of December 25, 2021 at 10:30 PM

I am far too ignorant of Prof. Warren's work to offer an opinion, Alex, although I understand that he was the editor of the Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism. [Don](#) might know something more there...

DeWitt's book is easy to recommend--in fact, I need to read it again myself, as it's been a few years.

I think my next read will be *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, by David Sedley. I was very impressed with the selection that Don read while we were discussing the Plague of Athens at the end of DNR Book 6.

I'm glad you enjoy the podcast! Hopefully someone else will have a more helpful response, Alex



-Joshua

Post by “Don” of December 25, 2021 at 10:50 PM

I don't know your location, [Alex](#) , but you might want to see if you can borrow the book from a library before purchasing it:

[Facing death : Epicurus and his critics \(Book, 2006\) \[WorldCat.org\]](#)

Prof. James Warren's faculty page: <https://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/directory/james-warren>

He does seem to have some specialization in Hellenistic philosophy, and did serve as editor of the Cambridge Companion as [Joshua](#) mentioned. I also see at the publisher's site <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0...f-9780199252893> that Voula Tsouna cites the book in her *The Ethics of Philodemus* which I own, and, yes, she cites him extensively in the chapter on the fear of death. So, I'd hold off on Warren's book unless you're specifically interested in that topic. If you want something a little expensive, I'd suggest Tsouna's book on Philodemus. I like it because it gives a number of translations of Philodemus's works that aren't readily available elsewhere.

Post by “Joshua” of December 25, 2021 at 11:38 PM

^ THAT is a more helpful response, thank you Don!

Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2021 at 7:37 AM

Alex thanks for the kind words about the podcast! We will do our best to keep feeding your appetite for our discussions! 😊

I have not read James Warren's book so i cannot comment with authority. I do think I can add something though:

1) i am confident that Warren's scholarship is good and that you will find much good material to consider on the points he is writing about. At the level at which he writes you can be sure that his sources are sound, and you'll no doubt gain a lot of good raw material to think about.

2) I do want to strongly note a general caution: James Warren is in my experience similar to Tim O'Keefe, who I would also make the same point as #1, but would have the same caution I am stating here. They write for an academic audience primarily, and not because they are primarily "advocates" for Epicurus. I don't know what their personal views are, but I find it very significant that you will rarely if ever see them citing DeWitt's analysis in their own books, except perhaps an occasional negative reference. I consider both Warren and Okeefe to be far too influenced by Stoicism, and my reading is that they are both of the view that you will often see criticized on this website as too far into the "absence of pain" viewpoint.

Without going too far down that rabbit hole again, I would urge you to read DeWitt before you read any of the more contemporary or the more specialized books. My experience is that someone at the beginning of their reading gets a good overall grounding in the big picture of Epicurus, especially as to how he opposed so much of Plato and Aristotle, then you will easily see how much is going on in Epicurus' mind beyond the "absence of pain" issue.

The alternative that I see occur far too regularly is that people will start with one of these "contemporary" books that focuses on "absence of pain," and that further pigeon-holes Epicurus in their mind as essentially the same as the Stoics but just with a twist as to word choice. Especially if you have an existing grounding in Buddhism or Stoicism or even just some types of modern psychology, it is easy to get the idea that this "absence of pain" issue is the key to everything else, and In my view that is a huge mistake.

So I would say to you what I would say to everybody: it is far better for you to read DeWitt's "general" treatment of the entire philosophy before you read any of the detailed presentations of the detailed sub-issues (like death, or on the gods, or on ethics of any kind). Maybe the best way to say it is that if you start with one of the sub-topics, you'll almost inevitably be presuming that you understand Epicurus' basic perspective (based on what everyone knows from high school or wikipedia) and you will dramatically underestimate him. I think Epicurus needs to be viewed essentially as a total revolutionary against much of existing Greek philosophy and religion, and it's far better to wipe your attitude of everything you think you know about him at the very beginning. Then as you gather all the additional data you will get from Okeefe and Warren and others you will know how to respond to it, because you'll begin to think as Epicurus did and you'll know what to test the varying opinions against.

Post by “Joshua” of December 26, 2021 at 11:44 AM

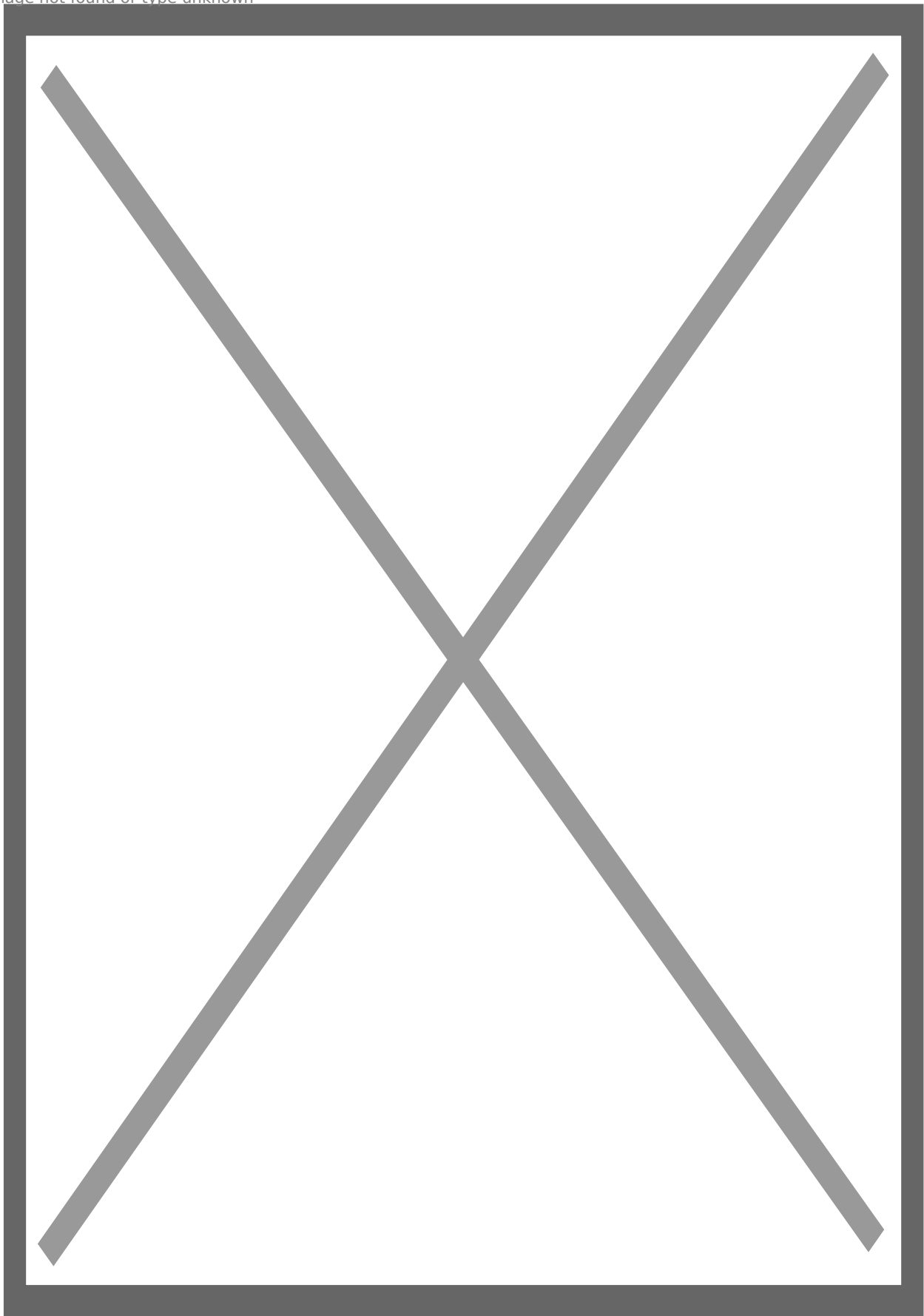
Notes:

The Good Place;

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=vfldNV22LQM>

The Brazen Bull;

Image not found or type unknown



[Brazen bull - Wikipedia](#)

en.m.wikipedia.org

Cicero's *In Pisonem*;

[M. Tullius Cicero, Against Piso, section 77](#)

(Somewhere in there he discusses the Brazen Bull)

Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2021 at 3:18 PM

and there is a place where Cicero ridicules Epicurus for his comment on a wise man under torture -- we will find that and add that here too.

Post by “Joshua” of December 26, 2021 at 6:56 PM

That part is somewhere in that text, but I haven't found where.

Post by “Alex” of December 26, 2021 at 7:15 PM

Thank you all!!!

Thank you Joshua. Interesting proposition to read more about Lucretius in the future.

Thank you Don. That's an excellent alternative, Tsouna's Book, in the waiting list as well.

And thank you Cassius. That's a rigorous analysis, in detail. I am going for DeWitt first, it makes sense.

Then I can consider subtopics in particular. I have now a better idea how to approach diverse books, considering all the confusion created around Epicurus' views (happiness, death, etcetera). By the way, mentioned several times in the podcast.

Thank you all, very much appreciated. I received not one but three replies in 24 hours. Amazing!

Excellent support, customers satisfied. I love this forum.

Post by “Cassius” of December 31, 2021 at 4:21 PM

Episode One Hundred Two of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Happy New Year! Celebrate the end of the old year or the beginning of the new with our latest episode. As always, let us know if you have any questions or comments

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/48124596>

Post by “Cassius” of December 31, 2021 at 4:24 PM

I am going to run out of time to finish this post but there is a comment at about the 50 minute mark by Joshua in regard to [PD39](#) that I want to elaborate on so this is a note to myself to come back to this. (In case I forget, it's a point about something in [PD39](#) that Joshua did not mention but which we should not omit, lest we as Epicureans be accused of being too willing to "turn the other cheek." 🙄)

Post by “Don” of January 3, 2022 at 8:39 AM

Listening to the podcast and found [Joshua](#) insight into the rack/ friends sayings about the characteristics of the wise very intriguing. I never considered the "he" in the second mention of torture to refer to the friends but now I'm not sure. I'm going to have to go back to the Greek and the manuscripts. You may need on to something! Thanks for the food for thought:

118 And even if the wise man be put on the rack, he is happy. Only the wise man will show gratitude, and will constantly speak well of his friends alike in their presence and their absence. Yet when *he* (the sage or the friend??) is on the rack, then he (the sage?) will cry out and lament.

PS: One hesitation is that the word "friends" is plural, and the "he" in the next sentence is singular. But I could see talking of friends in general then a specific friend in the singular. In any case, this has provided some thought-food.

Post by “Don” of January 3, 2022 at 10:09 AM

Quick pedantic reply to [Cassius](#) 's mention of the Tetrpharmakos.

The 4th line is actually:

Quote

And the terrible can be easily endured*

Not "easily avoided." That would change the whole flavor.

*And the terrible can be "endured" because it's either short and fatal or long and we can find some pleasure within it.

Post by “Joshua” of January 3, 2022 at 11:04 AM

Quote

56-57. The wise man feels no more pain when being tortured himself than when his friend tortured, and will die for him; for if he betrays his friend, his whole life will be confounded by distrust and completely upset.

This shows up in the Vatican Sayings on the torture question. To be honest, I barely remember talking about this!

Post by “Cassius” of January 3, 2022 at 11:08 AM

"56-57. The wise man feels no more pain when being tortured himself than when his friend tortured,"

Which doesn't mean that he won't feel pain in either situation, but that he will feel it in both situations. And this is probably one of those situations too where in some circumstances the mental pain could be as bad or worse than the physical.

I think we were discussing this in terms of whether wisdom allows a person to "will away pain" or even crowd out the pain completely through compensating pleasure, and I don't think either of those would be what Epicurus was saying.

Post by "Don" of January 3, 2022 at 11:10 AM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Quote

56-57. The wise man feels no more pain when being tortured himself than when his friend tortured, and will die for him; for if he betrays his friend, his whole life will be confounded by distrust and completely upset.

This shows up in the Vatican Sayings on the torture question. To be honest, I barely remember talking about this!

Well, it makes a difference if you said it a week ago (you) or just listened to it on the way to work (me) 😊 And I speak from experience!

That is a directly relevant VS, too! Thanks! I'm looking forward into digging into the manuscripts to see how they divide those up in Diogenes Laertius. Yeah, this is what I call fun 😊

Post by "Cassius" of January 3, 2022 at 11:18 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Yeah, this is what I call fun

Perfect for lifelong residence in whatever Gardens we can cook up !

Post by “Cassius” of January 3, 2022 at 11:24 AM

The "Good Place" clip is great!

HOWEVER, I would not agree with the punishment at the end !

The ONLY thing that is ultimately and always good in life is Pleasure, Not "People"! Life everything except pleasure itself, "People" can be desirable, undesirable, and all shades in between, depending on the circumstances, just as was implied by the questions of the blonde-haired lady in her response.

So if we are talking philosophically (and the trolley problem is a philosophical test) the only true equivalence is:

Pleasure = Good!

Right [Kalosyni](#)? 😊

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 3, 2022 at 12:39 PM

Have to share my feelings about "The Good Place" clip...on one level it is comedy, and on another level it illustrates how modern civilization might be "devolving" as evinced by the petty thoughts of the characters, and the story line. A few years ago with a friend...watched a few of the very early episodes of "The Good Place" and found it unappealing. Watching this clip reminds me that I can both laugh at comedy and feel disgusted by the underlying ideas presented. Perhaps some people find that internal discord entertaining. I would guess that it was presented here simply as a way to quickly illustrate the "trolley problem".

I haven't listened to the podcast yet...will have more to say after listening. 😊

Post by “Joshua” of January 3, 2022 at 1:13 PM

The Good Place has a great arc, if anyone does decide to watch it I'd at least see it through to the end of the first season 😊

Post by “Matt” of January 3, 2022 at 1:25 PM

I had a feeling Ted Danson was going say something like he did. ☐

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 3, 2022 at 2:38 PM

I just finished listening to the podcast...enjoyed it hearing many of the ideas presented, even though there were some hard topics presented (the torture description which I had never heard of before).

It seems to me that this podcast points to tranquil pleasures as being very important.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain." --Cicero, paragraph #56

This explains the importance of absence of pain in Epicureanism.

And there was a comment about Cyrenaics...didn't take notes, so can't restate the exact quote. Instead, I will give this description from Wikipedia:

Quote

"The Cyrenaics taught that the only intrinsic good is pleasure, which meant not just the absence of pain (as it did for [Epicurus](#)), but positively enjoyable sensations. Of these,

momentary pleasures, especially physical ones, are stronger than those of anticipation or memory. They did, however, recognize the value of social obligation and that pleasure could be gained from [altruistic](#) behaviour. The school died out within a century and was replaced by the philosophy of [Epicureanism](#)."

I just feels like there is so much in common between the two schools. Because even mental pleasures of anticipation or memory exists "in time" and so has a momentary quality.

It is possible that my own belief leans more toward the Cyrenaics. Memory might become more important for me if I grow old and infirm. But for now I both need and want to "indulge" in pleasurable activity...and I choose healthy activities that don't bring pain or problems.

Post by "Don" of January 3, 2022 at 4:39 PM

Here's another article on the Cyrenaics:

[Cyrenaics | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

It's a solid article. Here are just a couple quick snippets:

Another striking feature of the Cyrenaic theory is its lack of future-concern. The Cyrenaics advocate going after whatever will bring one pleasure now, enjoying the pleasure while one is experiencing it, and not worrying too much about what the future will bring. Although the Cyrenaics say that prudence is valuable for attaining pleasure, they do not seem much concerned with exercising self-control in pursuing pleasure, or with deferring present pleasures (or undergoing present pains) for the sake of experiencing greater pleasure (or avoiding greater pains) in the future.

The Cyrenaics instead aim at enjoying the pleasures that are present, without letting themselves be troubled at what is not present, that is, the past and future. Epicurus thinks that the memory of past pleasures, and the expectation of future pleasures, are themselves most pleasant, and hence he emphasizes the importance of careful planning in arranging what one will experience in the future. The Cyrenaics, however, deny this, saying that pleasures are pleasant only when actually being experienced.

That's been why I've gravitated to the Epicureans and not the Cyrenaics. I'm not "old and infirm" but I take great pleasure in reliving trips taken and other events in the past. I just did a nice review of last year on Jan 1 and took great pleasure in thinking about what my family was able to do this past year all things considered.

Post by “Cassius” of January 3, 2022 at 6:45 PM

[Quote from Matt](#)

had a feeling Ted Danson was going say something like he did

OMG that was Ted Danson from "Cheers?"

[Quote from Don](#)

I'm not "old and infirm"

Having seen Ted Danson for the first time in years I will admit to feeling VERY old and infirm!



Post by “Alex” of January 6, 2022 at 6:35 PM

Cassius and Joshua,

In relation to the comments "being able to be happy even under a torture session" during the last episode, where should I read again in Lucretius' Nature of things? Perhaps in "the senses" section.

It's about Cicero's critic/mockery on this specific idea, taken from a letter written by Epicurus if I remember well. It really took my attention. I also remember the differentiation between happiness and pleasure. It was interesting indeed, not bad to kick off the new year.

I'd like to review these elements in the book. Thank you both.

Post by “Cassius” of January 6, 2022 at 7:28 PM

Good question, Alex, but can you clarify what you are asking? At this precise moment I am not recalling a part of Lucretius specifically on this as much as I am remembering Diogenes Laertius and Cicero's criticism. And then as to the relationship between happiness and pleasure there is the "shout" part of Diogenes of Oinoanda and then several instances here in Torquatus.

Can you clarify your question? (Or maybe Joshua or Don or someone can go ahead and respond further as is.)

Post by “Alex” of January 7, 2022 at 8:07 PM

Yeah, sorry about the confusion.

All the comments and quotations in the few last episodes (Cicero's criticism for example) are interesting because I can learn and analyse about stoicism more in detail, how they confront epicurean philosophy, etcetera. It's useful to review other opinions and thinkers to compare and contrast, it makes the debate wiser I believe.

So I fancy to go back to Lucretius and reading again about that topic, related to Cicero's criticism. I thought I should review 'the senses' as the most appropriate reading; is that correct? Therefore, the question was what book exactly should I review? Perhaps you could recommend two or more passages from different books. I don't intend to read all six books again.

As you can see, I am not that good to produce an argument or ask a clear question. Just confusion.

Thank you.

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2022 at 8:37 PM

Ha no problem! Lucretius does not much confront the Stoics directly except by implication.

I think you might find helpful the appendix on logic in the DeLacy book on Philodemus' On Signs. - at the back of the book. He has a very good section on the development of Epicurean empiricism that might address what you are looking for to compare to the Stoics.

But you may be asking about a certain part of the debate rather than just the whole Stoic v Epicurean debate. If you are looking at the higher level, have you read DeWitt?

Post by “Alex” of January 9, 2022 at 6:54 PM

Thank you, Cassius.

You did recommend me to carry on with DeWitt after Lucretius, rather than searching for subtopics. I am going to follow your advice as soon as I can. I agree, DeWitt is the best option to start digging into Epicurean philosophy.

In the meanwhile, I enjoy the episodes very much, it's a rich debate about subtopics. I do like Joshua's participation, I can't get enough. I came across analysis and comments about Epicurean view on death in the last two episodes, very interesting indeed, a subtopic that appeal to me.

Also, the view on happiness/pleasure even during hardship comes handy to me right now due to negative circumstances. I am facing adversity (accommodation, finances) so I am under pressure. I have to deal with it. Therefore, I have no choice but let DeWitt aside at the moment. Nevertheless, I find a certain degree of sanity (happiness/pleasure) when listening to the podcast every week. I forget about adversity for one hour. I might be applying Epicurean principles unconsciously, who knows. I've just realised that I am participating in this particular forum, asking questions and so on, despite the situation; a bit strange to be honest.

In the near future, once I find myself in a better position, I go for DeWitt.

Thanks for the comments and advice Cassius, I appreciate it.

Post by "Cassius" of January 9, 2022 at 7:07 PM

"Good luck" with your circumstances Alex. I am sure most of deal with varying degrees of serious problems and yes reading Epicurus is a refuge from the storms and gives hope and grounding to weather them.