

Episode One Hundred Five - More From Torquatus On The Key Doctrines of Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of January 14, 2022 at 10:19 AM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Five 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. Last week we spent most of the episode discussing several listener questions. Today we return to the Torquatus text and look more closely at this list of core Epicurean doctrines.

Now let's join Martin reading today's text:

[62] XIX. But these doctrines may be stated in a certain manner so as not merely to disarm our criticism, but actually to secure our sanction. For this is the way in which Epicurus represents the wise man as continually happy; he keeps his passions within bounds; about death he is indifferent; he holds true views concerning the eternal gods apart from all dread; he has no hesitation in crossing the boundary of life, if that be the better course. Furnished with these advantages he is continually in a state of pleasure, and there is in truth no moment at which he does not experience more pleasures than pains. For he remembers the past with thankfulness, and the present is so much his own that he is aware of its importance and its agreeableness, nor is he in dependence on the future, but awaits it while enjoying the present; he is also very far removed from those defects of character which I quoted a little time ago, and when he compares the fool's life with his own, he feels great pleasure. And pains, if any befall him, have never power enough to prevent the wise man from finding more reasons for joy than for

vexation.

[63] It was indeed excellently said by Epicurus that fortune only in a small degree crosses the wise man's path, and that his greatest and most important undertakings are executed in accordance with his own design and his own principles, and that no greater pleasure can be reaped from a life which is without end in time, than is reaped from this which we know to have its allotted end. He judged that the logic of your school possesses no efficacy either for the amelioration of life or for the facilitation of debate. He laid the greatest stress on natural science. That branch of knowledge enables us to realize clearly the force of words and the natural conditions of speech and the theory of consistent and contradictory expressions; and when we have learned the constitution of the universe we are relieved of superstition, are emancipated from the dread of death, are not agitated through ignorance of phenomena, from which ignorance, more than any thing else, terrible panics often arise; finally, our characters will also be improved when we have learned what it is that nature craves. Then again if we grasp a firm knowledge of phenomena, and uphold that canon, which almost fell from heaven into human ken, that test to which we are to bring all our judgments concerning things, we shall never succumb to any man's eloquence and abandon our opinions.

[64] Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, then only will cognition and perception become possible. Now those who invalidate sensations and say that perception is altogether impossible, cannot even clear the way for this very argument of theirs when they have thrust the senses aside. Moreover, when cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated. So from natural science we borrow courage to withstand the fear of death, and firmness to face superstitious dread, and tranquillity of mind, through the removal of ignorance concerning the mysteries of the world, and self-control, arising from the elucidation of the nature of the passions and their different classes, and as I shewed just now, our leader again has established the canon and criterion of knowledge and thus has imparted to us a method for marking off falsehood from truth.

Post by "Joshua" of January 15, 2022 at 11:56 PM

A collection of diverse quotes on wisdom and the like from other philosophers. Plucked haphazardly from wikiquote.

Plato:

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"And all knowledge, when separated from justice and virtue, is seen to be cunning and not wisdom; wherefore make this your first and last and constant and all-absorbing aim, to exceed, if possible, not only us but all your ancestors in virtue; and know that to excel you in virtue only brings us shame, but that to be excelled by you is a source of happiness to us."

"I only wish that wisdom were the kind of thing that flowed ... from the vessel that was full to the one that was empty."

Aristotle:

"The wise man must not be ordered but must order, and he must not obey another, but the less wise must obey him."

"The truly good and wise man will bear all kinds of fortune in a seemly way, and will always act in the noblest manner that the circumstances allow."

Aristippus, the Cyrenaic:

On one occasion he was asked in what respect a wise man is superior to one who is not wise; and his answer was:

"Send them both naked among strangers, and you will find out."

Diogenes, the Cynic:

"Everything belongs to the gods; the wise are friends of the gods; friends hold all things in common; ergo, everything belongs to the wise."

"The noblest people are those despising wealth, learning, pleasure and life; esteeming above them poverty, ignorance, hardship and death."

Zeno, the Stoic:

"If melodiously piping flutes sprang from the olive, would you doubt that a knowledge of flute-playing resided in the olive? And what if plane trees bore harps which gave forth rhythmical sounds? Clearly you would think in the same way that the art of music was possessed by plane trees. Why, then, seeing that the universe gives birth to beings that are animate and wise, should it not be considered animate and wise itself?"

"No one entrusts a secret to a drunken man; but one will entrust a secret to a good man; therefore, the good man will not get drunk."

Post by "smoothiekiwi" of January 16, 2022 at 3:47 AM

Wow, all of these don't seem to be nice guys- except Aristippus, he sounds funny 😄

Post by “Joshua” of January 16, 2022 at 12:30 PM

We did a good job for once of sticking to the details of the text, so I don't have much to add this week.

Show Notes:

That elusive Cicero quote;

Quote

If I am mistaken in my opinion that the human soul is immortal, I willingly err; nor would I have this pleasant error extorted from me; and if, as some minute philosophers suppose, death should deprive me of my being, I need not fear the raillery of those pretended philosophers when they are no more.

This quotation might be spurious--I at least cannot find any citation. It was attributed to Cicero as early as the 1850's. *Mea Culpa!*

Sydney Morganbesser; scroll down for several humorous [anecdotes](#).

The Brazen [Bull](#) of [Phalaris](#)

[On the Nature of the Gods](#), also by Cicero.

John Mulaney; [Being in the moment](#)

[Mindfulness](#); Is it [Overhyped](#)?

I was somewhat critical of the 'mindfulness movement' that's been raging for the last decade and a half. But in this, as in all things, I take an Epicurean view of choice and avoidance. If mindfulness brings pleasure or removes or avoids pain, then pursue it! What I reject is specifically the idea that mindfulness is inherently good, or absent-mindedness bad.

Post by “Cassius” of January 19, 2022 at 8:52 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2339-episode-one-hundred-five-more-from-torquatus-on-the-key-doctrines-of-epicurus/>

I am making good progress editing the podcast but before I forget let me issue this apology. When we recorded this past weekend we had a winter storm going, and it appears that the storm significantly impacted the bandwidth of my connection. The result is that my side of the recording has more interruptions and background noise than usual. It seems I also didn't hear Martin and Joshua speaking and I talked over them more than usual. I am going to edit to correct these issues as much as possible but thought I would make note that we're aware that the audio quality of this one may be a little subpar. Skype generally works well for this purpose but when it tries to compensate for bad connections the audio quality suffers.

Post by “Cassius” of January 19, 2022 at 11:44 AM

Episode 105 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we continue with Torquatus' summary of some of the Key Doctrines of Epicurus.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/48364911>

Post by “Cassius” of January 19, 2022 at 4:38 PM

I just listened to the finished episode and I was right that my bandwidth significantly impacted my own part of the show. I will work to improve that including a new mike I bought today.

Post by “Don” of January 24, 2022 at 8:03 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

I was somewhat critical of the 'mindfulness movement' that's been raging for the last decade and a half. But in this, as in all things, I take an Epicurean view of choice and avoidance. If mindfulness brings pleasure or removes or avoids pain, then pursue it! What I reject is specifically the idea that mindfulness is inherently good, or absent-

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mindedness bad

I'll be the first to say I find John Mulaney funny, and I agree that "mindfulness" may be overhyped or better stated, become just another commodity to be monetized. However, I believe it is objectively true that we can only live in the present moment (literally) because that's where we make our choices and rejections. There's nothing "wrong" with daydreaming and letting your mind wander ("not all those who wander are lost"). But we do that *now* and can make that choice now... Even deciding to "let it happen" is a choice of sorts.

I'm also intrigued by the interoception research going on and its connection to mindfulness (writ large) and that potential connection to Epicurus's philosophy of "listening to your feelings" of pleasure and pain: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/a...g-interoception>

Post by “Joshua” of January 24, 2022 at 11:50 AM

Ironically, [Don](#), John Mulaney cited meditation as being helpful in his rehab efforts. So I didn't tell the full story there 😊

In recent news, Thich Naht Hanh has died this weekend at the age of 95. I've listened to a great many of his talks and read a few of his books. I'm hesitant to suggest that what he has to say will easily integrate with what we're trying to do here, but if this is something that interests people I can easily recommend his works, as well as those by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Post by “smoothiekiwi” of January 24, 2022 at 12:30 PM

Well, I think that defining mindfulness is rather difficult... I would probably agree that calmness is overhyped; life is great when there are disturbances, joy and pleasure. But mindfulness in itself is more often than not good. Frankly, I can't even find an example when mindfulness is bad or has harmful effects.

Post by “Scott” of January 25, 2022 at 2:26 PM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

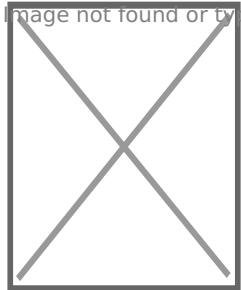
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I agree @smoothiekiwi, Mindfulness is used for what most folks would consider "positive" purposes - generally. I have it as a technique I keep in my back pocket & I employ it often. It can be a positive tool And being "mindless" all the time is not a great option, IMHO. **But**, just to make a point ...Mindfulness as a technique can and has been used for about anything. On the extreme end, there is no reason a serial killer or assassin couldn't use it to better focus, control tension and anxiety when attempting a kill, etc. As a concrete example along these lines, Mindfulness is being used for training elite US (and other countries) military personnel - and not just for things like recovery from PTSD, but even for them to be better able to perform in high tension combat situations.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mindfu...-special-forces>

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[Mindfulness training as cognitive training in high-demand cohorts: An initial study in elite military servicemembers](#)

Cognitive ability is a key selection criterion for entry into many elite professions. Herein, we investigate whether mindfulness training (MT) can enh...

www.sciencedirect.com

<https://www.army.mod.uk/people/join-well/managing-stress/mindfulness-course/>

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