

Episode One Hundred Eleven - Torquatus Summarizes The Significance of the Epicurus

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2022 at 10:06 PM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Eleven 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 complete the section on Friendship.

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

[71] XXI. Wherefore, if the doctrines I have stated are more dazzling and luminous than the sun itself, if they are draughts drawn from nature's spring, if our whole argument establishes its credit entirely by an appeal to our senses, that is to say, to witnesses who are untainted and unblemished, if speechless babes and even dumb beasts almost cry out that with nature for our governor and guide there is no good fortune but pleasure, no adverse fortune but pain, and their verdict upon these matters is neither perverted nor tainted, are we not bound to entertain the greatest gratitude for the man who, lending his ear to this voice of nature, as I may call it, grasped it in so strong and serious a spirit that he guided all thoroughly sober-minded men into the track of a peaceful, quiet, restful, happy life? And though you think him ill-educated, the reason is that he held no education of any worth, but such as promoted the ordered life of happiness.

[72] Was he the man to spend his time in conning poets as I and Triarius do on your advice, when they afford no substantial benefit, and all the enjoyment they give is childish in kind, or was he the man to waste himself, like Plato, upon music, geometry, mathematics and

astronomy, which not only start from false assumptions and so cannot be true, but if they were true would not aid us one whit towards living a more agreeable, that is a better life? Was he, I ask, the man to pursue those arts and thrust behind him the art of living, an art of such moment, so laborious too, and correspondingly rich in fruit? Epicurus then is not uneducated, but those persons are uninstructed who think that subjects which it is disgraceful to a boy not to have learned, are to be learned through life into old age!

Rackham Translation:

XXI. If then the doctrine I have set forth is clearer and more luminous than daylight itself; if it is derived entirely from Nature's source; if my whole discourse relies throughout for confirmation on the unbiased and unimpeachable evidence of the senses; if lisping infants, nay even dumb animals, prompted by Nature's teaching, almost find voice to proclaim that there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain—and their judgment in these matters is neither sophisticated nor biased—ought we not to feel the greatest gratitude to him who caught this utterance of Nature's voice, and grasped its import so firmly and so fully that he has guided all sane-minded men into the paths of peace and happiness, calmness and repose?

You are pleased to think him uneducated. The reason is that he refused to consider any education worth the name that did not help to school us in happiness. Was he to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, in perusing poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but merely childish amusement? Was he to occupy himself like Plato with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which starting from false premises cannot be true, and which moreover if they were true would contribute nothing to make our lives pleasanter and therefore better? Was he, I say, to study arts like these, and neglect the master art, so difficult and correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living?

No! Epicurus was not uneducated: the real philistines are those who ask us to go on studying till old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learnt in boyhood.

Post by “Cassius” of February 22, 2022 at 10:09 PM

As I suggested at the end of Episode One Hundred Nine, I'm looking for some way to deliver some special zip to the reading of this week's text, since it is Torquatus' final shout-out to Epicurus and is particularly memorable. I promise that if anyone can produce a musical or singing or special spoken word edition of this text and can send us a media file that we will include it in the episode!

Note that the post above includes both the Reid and the Rackham translation, and either version works fine. In this case I don't see any major issues that make Reid superior, and the smoothness of Rackham's version may make it more memorable. We'll probably have Martin read one and Joshua the other, but there is room for more.

As for Rackham: "Philistines" -for example - may not have been the word that Torquatus used, but it carries a special weight in English today.

As for both: I never get tired of hearing how we should be embarrassed that we did not learn these things as children!

Post by "Joshua" of February 22, 2022 at 10:46 PM

If there are no other takers, I will suggest that this section at the end was perhaps the most passionate and intense portion of my reading of the whole text.

I was, however, rather running out of breath after a long recording session. So if necessary, I can probably record these passages again separately, and hopefully will better quality!

Post by "Cassius" of February 23, 2022 at 5:13 AM

We will definitely hark back to that version, and we can add any others that are newly generated. Thanks to youtube we can cue right to that point (48:30):

https://youtu.be/ZVGgP55_wUY?t=2910

Post by "Cassius" of February 23, 2022 at 5:23 AM

An eight year old computer voice version, which is surprisingly clear:

<https://youtu.be/CnmAmLju-RY?t=2721>

Post by “Cassius” of February 23, 2022 at 5:29 AM

Here's a version by a rank beginner, twelve years ago:

<https://youtu.be/S8moFMd3AmA?t=187>

Post by “Cassius” of February 27, 2022 at 11:23 AM

You never know exactly where discussions will end up and I want to remember to comment about this so posting it now:

We ended up with some interesting opinions on the meaning of:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

No! Epicurus was not uneducated: the real philistines are those who ask us to go on studying till old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learnt in boyhood.

Martin raised the issue: Is this a reference to continuing to study "music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy," or a broader reference to philosophy itself?

You'll need to hear our discussion to get the subtlety of the difference but I had previously thought this a reference more to "philosophic conclusions in general" such as "pleasure is the goal" rather than to the other sciences. In particular, what is that that the word "learnt" or "learned" is supposed to refer to? Does that imply that a particular study to be "completed?"

For those of you who may have heard recent AFDIA sessions, is this related to Kevin's observation that he wondered whether Epicurus thought he had "figured out" certain important questions with some sense of finality?

I'll get the episode posted as soon as I can but this is one question raised today that I think will be worth discussing.

Post by “Cassius” of March 4, 2022 at 9:26 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2412-episode-one-hundred-eleven-torquatus-summarizes-the-significance-of-the-epicurus/>

Episode 111 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today we complete our section on Torquatus with an examination of the ultimate significance of Epicurus.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/48957750>

Post by “Godfrey” of March 5, 2022 at 4:59 PM

The attached paper may add something to your discussion of poetry (although I haven't read it). It looks like something [Joshua](#) in particular may find interesting.

It's a chapter of a book on Georgics, and from a quick viewing it appears to touch on Epicurus' critique of Homer and Virgil's critique of Lucretius.

Post by “Don” of March 6, 2022 at 10:31 PM

παιδείαν δὲ πᾶσαν, μακάριε, φεῦγε τὰκάτιον ἀράμενος.

I really like this saying! My own translation is:

"Flee from all indoctrination, O blessed one, and hoist the sail of your own little boat."

The "flee" φεῦγε is the same word that Epicurus uses in choices and *rejections" and I've shared my thoughts on that word elsewhere in the forum. I've chosen "indoctrination" here for παιδείαν since that is what Epicurus seems to consider the prevailing system of education in his time to be, nothing more than indoctrination.

In LSJ, under παιδεια one finds the definition "training and teaching, education, opp. τροφή" and that word, the opposite of παιδείαν, is defined as:

- nourishment, food; that which provides or procures sustenance;a meal
- nurture, rearing, upbringing
- education
- II.nurture, rearing, bringing up, Hdt., Trag.; in pl., ἐν τροφᾶϊσιν while in the nursery, Aesch., etc.
- rearing or keeping of animals
- a place in which animals are reared

So it looks like τροφή has more of a connection to nature and rearing and not indoctrination, whereas παιδεία has more of a sense of acculturation, something imposed or overlaid on the individual.

I also like the image of the τ(ο) ἀκάτιον, "a small boat or skiff with a single sail." That's why I chose "little boat" instead of ship, for example, but didn't choose a specific kind of boat because who (other than one who sails) knows the difference among skiff, dinghy, skow, etc. It's just a small craft.

My perspective is that this encapsulates the Epicurean concept of self-reliance.

So, maybe we need to find our own path, our own art of living; but, once we've embarked, we'll find like-minded individuals with whom to walk the path with us - to join our small flotilla to keep the metaphor of this saying. The journey comes first. We find companions along the way.

Post by “Cassius” of March 7, 2022 at 6:20 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

So, maybe we need to find our own path, our own art of living; but, once we've embarked, we'll find like-minded individuals with whom to walk the path with us - to join our small flotilla to keep the metaphor of this saying.

Yes I agree. Today at least in the USA we have the internet, and relative freedom, and can legitimately hope to reach out and find and be influenced by other "rebels" relatively early on. In more primitive or repressive societies, or where you just have few resources, it's pretty easy to see that only those with strong wills and maybe special circumstances to generate their own rebellion are going to be able to do so, and they are more likely to have to launch off on their own first before finding any like-minded friends at all.

Post by “Joshua” of March 7, 2022 at 8:59 PM

[Godfrey](#), yes I certainly did find that worth reading! Thank you.

Post by “Godfrey” of March 7, 2022 at 11:21 PM

Glad you enjoyed it [Joshua](#) , you're quite welcome.