

Episode 156 - Lucretius Today Interviews Dr. Emily Austin - Part One

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2023 at 12:58 AM

Welcome to episode 156, a special two-part Episode 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. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you too 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. Today we are very pleased to bring you an interview with a special guest: Dr. Emily Austin, professor of Philosophy at Wake Forest University.

Dr. Austin is author of the book "Living for Pleasure: an Epicurean Guide to Life," which was published in November 2022 by the Oxford University Press as part of its Guides to the Good Life Series. Dr. Austin graduated summa cum laude in philosophy from Hendrix College in Arkansas, and she received her doctorate from Washington University in St. Louis in 2009. Since that time, she has been teaching philosophy at Wake Forest in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Dr. Austin applies both her academic credentials and her teaching skills to the task of showing how Epicurean philosophy differs sharply from Stoicism, and how it stands for a truly positive approach to life that isn't grounded in asceticism, but in a complete understanding of the central and uncompromising appreciation of "Pleasure" in the pursuit of happiness.

Time Stamps:

- 19:15 - How do you deal with the objection that "pleasure" cannot be the full goal of life?
 - People can't describe their view of the good life without discussing pleasure.
 - Some people seem to think that pain is good
 - Discussion of the opening of book 2 of Lucretius - looking out from safety at people who are in distress
 - Cultural problems today arising from Puritanism
- 28:00 - What is the role of one's view of "death" in Epicurean philosophy?
 - Desire for immortal life is corrosive
 - References to "Lonesome Dove"
 - References to Montaigne
- 39:45 - Some people see a tension between pursuit of pleasure as opposed to pursuit of tranquility. How do you reconcile that question and summarize the issue of how much pleasure is enough? Was Epicurus an ascetic?

- Epicurus is not only about tranquility, and this is a misunderstanding among modern supporters of Epicurus as well as his opponents.
- Epicurus does not oppose natural and unnecessary desires.
- Dr Austin had to insist that the word "Pleasure" be in the title of her book.
- It is a mistake to make Epicurus too much like other tranquility seeking philosophies, but the first step most people need to take is to deal with anxiety so they can then pursue and prioritize desires more prudently.
- It is a charitable impulse to say that Epicurus is not about partying all the time, but people over-correct and seem to make Epicurus to be opposed to pleasure.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/52475628>

Post by “Cassius” of January 18, 2023 at 1:37 PM

Episode 156 - part one of our very special interview with Dr. Emily Austin, is now available. Part two will be posted within the next week, but in the meantime this first episode contains a lot to talk about. Thanks to Dr. Austin for allowing us to interview her, and we look forward to much more in the future!

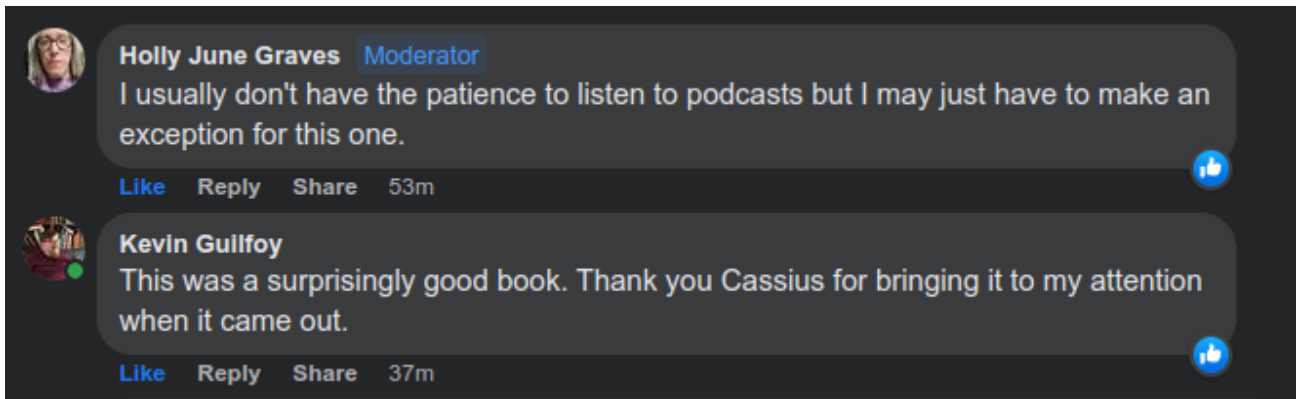
<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/52475628>

Post by “Todd” of January 18, 2023 at 1:58 PM

Fantastic podcast!

Post by “Cassius” of January 18, 2023 at 3:13 PM

Two Facebook comments to the podcast:



I don't know about the "surprisingly," but given that the second commenter is a philosophy professor himself, that's high praise! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 19, 2023 at 5:05 PM

I have been listening to this episode several times to try to think about how to expand on some of the details.

I think our serendipitous references "going to Rome" proved to be a good way of visualizing the question of how much pleasure to pursue in life. Dr Austin herself was reflecting on the word "enrich" as a way to look at it.

I wonder if anyone has any thoughts on the usefulness of this analogy and the direction the discussion took.

How many times should we desire to visit Rome?

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 19, 2023 at 6:17 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

How many times should we desire to visit Rome?

On the usefulness of the analogy: That is like asking how many time per week should we desire to make love.

If you desire to go to Rome, should you go? Can you afford to go? Is it distracting you from something else you should do instead?

This could be a good topic for our 20th meeting. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 19, 2023 at 6:24 PM

Virtually every aspect of the discussion in both part 1 and part 2 is good food for thought. Dr. Austin does a good job with it but as she says, this is new territory for all of us, to think about how best to express and defend the positions. Experience doing it will make us all better both in understanding and in communication.

Post by “Don” of February 20, 2023 at 8:41 AM

Follow-up on the Lonesome Dove quote that Dr. Austin refers to:

Quote

“Lorie darlin’, life in San Francisco, you see, is still just life. If you want any one thing too badly, it’s likely to turn out to be a disappointment. The only healthy way to live life is to learn to like all the little everyday things, like a sip of good whiskey in the evening, a soft bed, a glass of buttermilk, or a feisty gentleman like myself.”

😊 Tell it, Gus.

Post by “Bryan” of July 1, 2023 at 11:48 AM

Very interesting that she had to press her editor/publishers to keep the word "pleasure" in the title - this was great!

Post by “Pacatus” of November 1, 2023 at 2:24 PM

Confession: I’m generally not a podcast kind of guy – unlike many people, I find it harder to absorb information aurally. But, after listening to the Lucretius Today interview with Dr. Boeri, I decided to listen to the ones with Dr. Emily Austin. (And will likely do more.)

I had to pause briefly because Cassius just gave me my laugh-out-oud line of the day (in the context of how our culture seems to affirm pain rather than pleasure as virtuous/good) with his tongue-in-cheek: “Thank you, Puritans, for establishing what we call American culture!” 😄👄

To which Dr. Austin responded: “Those people were weird!” 😄

Post by “Cassius” of November 1, 2023 at 3:06 PM

That was indeed a great line but if I recall correctly, all credit goes to DON for that one! 😄

Post by “Raphael Raul” of July 7, 2026 at 10:36 PM

Cassius, when I lived in Paris in the 1980s studying at L’Académie des Beaux, I went to Rome many times and had the opportunity to dig at the Roman Forum with an archaeological expedition through the American Academy in Rome. These and many other wonderful memories I have are from exactly 40 years ago, and they are clearer than what I did last Tuesday. So, yes, go to Rome, visit Venice, live in Paris if you can. If you can’t, enjoy what you have: a walk on a soft summer night, a game of chess with a friend, dinner with your elderly mother.