

Episode 177 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 29 - Chapter 12 - The New Hedonism 06

Post by "Cassius" of June 1, 2023 at 9:36 AM

Welcome to Episode 177 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 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. We are now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy." This week we continue our discussion of Chapter 12, entitled "The New Hedonism."

This week:

Continuous Pain Impossible

The Relation of Pleasure To Virtue

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/54137943>

Post by "Cassius" of June 1, 2023 at 9:43 AM

I am not sure how far we will get in this next episode and whether we will start or finish the "relationship of pleasure to virtue" section. However I want to note that yesterday I spent some quality time reviewing Book Two of On Ends, which contains Cicero's full frontal attack on Epicurus and the notion that pleasure should be seen as the highest good. Reading that part again in the context of our current discussions meant much more to me than it sometimes has in the past.

When I first started writing on the internet about Epicurus I was more focused on the clash between virtue and pleasure through the sparring that took place with the Stoic school. This attack in Book 2 by Cicero (who goes on in the following sections to thrash the Stoics almost as much as he does Epicurus) is a reminder that we should not really concerned as much about

sniping over logic as we should be about the ultimate issue: and that is, what it is deep down that the advocates of "virtue" and of "pleasure" are really saying about the source of their commitment to their respective positions?

When reading Cicero it is easy to see that it is not "logic" that motivates Cicero's adherence to "virtue" as much as it is what I might call an "emotional attachment." Although Cicero will not admit it, it gives Cicero much "pleasure" to advocate for virtue, and that is an issue that must be addressed and answered in equally forceful terms. It seems to me that the best way to really persuade in response to a passionate advocacy of a noble lie is the passionate advocacy of "the truth," and Cicero does not provide what the Epicureans much surely have been thinking when they read his final version of "On Ends." Cicero's statement of this position is as forceful and important than anything the Stoics had to say about virtue, and it is neatly packaged here for us to review in full. Given its forcefulness, this is a much more important issue to address than even concerns about whether discussion of "absence of pain" and "tranquility" can be twisted into indolence and passivity. Some people, yes, are tempted to interpret Epicureanism as a form of Buddhism, but the far greater challenge that has in fact been the one that has kept Epicurus at bay for 2000 years is that he was a moral invalid and that a life of pleasure is hardly worthy of a cow, much less of a human being.

Here at EpicureanFriends we tend to accentuate the positive, and to the extent we talk about Torquatus we focus only on his positive argument, but what we find in Book Two is that Cicero muzzles Torquatus and brings an array of arguments that he doesn't allow Torquatus to answer -- Cicero lamely ends he chapter with Torquatus saying that Philodemus and Siro would be better equipped to respond on Epicurus' behalf.

I think we can learn a lot from going through Cicero's arguments and responding to them ourselves, and in the coming weeks I will look for ways for us to address those issues and muster a public response to them,

Post by "Joshua" of June 4, 2023 at 11:30 AM

I cited a passage from Thomas More's *Utopia*:

Quote

[Utopus] therefore left men wholly to their liberty, that they might be free to believe as they should see cause; only he made a solemn and severe law against such as should so far degenerate from the dignity of human nature, as to think that our souls died with our bodies, or that the world was governed by chance, without a wise overruling

Providence: for they all formerly believed that there was a state of rewards and punishments to the good and bad after this life; and they now look on those that think otherwise as scarce fit to be counted men, since they degrade so noble a being as the soul, and reckon it no better than a beast's: thus they are far from looking on such men as fit for human society, or to be citizens of a well-ordered commonwealth; since a man of such principles must needs, as oft as he dares do it, despise all their laws and customs: for there is no doubt to be made, that a man who is afraid of nothing but the law, and apprehends nothing after death, will not scruple to break through all the laws of his country, either by fraud or force, when by this means he may satisfy his appetites.

Post by “Joshua” of June 4, 2023 at 11:34 AM

And we also briefly discussed a passing reference to the 6th epistle of the first book of Horace:

Quote

If your lungs or kidneys were attacked by cruel disease,
You'd seek relief from the disease. You wish to live well:
Who does not? If it's virtue alone achieves it, then
Be resolute, forgo pleasure. But if you consider
Virtue's only words, a forest wood: then beware
Lest your rival's first to dock, lest you lose Cibra's
Or Bithynia's trade. Cleared a thousand, and another?
Then add a third pile, round it off with a fourth.
Surely wife and dowry, loyalty and friends, birth
And beauty too are the gifts of Her Highness Cash,
While Venus and Charm grace the moneyed classes.
Don't be like Cappadocia's king, rich in slaves
Short of lucre. They say Lucullus was asked

If he could lend the theatre a hundred Greek cloaks.
'Who could find all those? he answered, 'but I'll see,
And send what I've got'. Later, a note: 'It seems at home
I've five thousand: take any of them, take the lot'
It's a poor house where there isn't much to spare,
Much that evades the master, benefits his slaves.
If wealth alone will make you happy, and keep you so,
Be first to strive for it again, and last to leave off.
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Post by "Joshua" of June 4, 2023 at 11:37 AM

And also the poem I wrote in response to that passage from Horace:

Firewood

While walking in the woods, I am at pains
To pause at each cold circle of burnt stone.
A totemic blending of the profane
And sacred: a human altar where none
So human live—where memory and time
Are sacrificed in their concentric rings,
The ageless for the transitory. Each
Ring is a dolmen, or a stele of lime,
And tells of the past in a varied speech.
It gives me pause, this strange *chaleur vitale*¹.

I think on sacred groves—such that deterred
Thoreau², and Horace, with that old Ital-
ic saw: *Do you think Virtue naught but words,
A forest only firewood?* For though
The greater mass goes up in flame, pile
Upon pile of charcoal lying near
Sighs at this loss; of what, I do not know—
But that it pleases me to wander here.

¹French, [Vital Heat](#)

²Walden; "I would that our farmers when they cut down a forest felt some of that awe which the old Romans did when they came to thin, or let in the light to, a consecrated grove (*lucum conlucre*), that is, would believe that it is sacred to some god."

Post by “Cassius” of June 4, 2023 at 11:54 AM

Thanks for those excerpts Joshua. Both are great, and I bet can tease more meaning out of Horace if we eventually figure out exactly the context in which Horace was making his point.

I probably will have to apologize for a second week for my conduct on the podcast. Last week I was congested and painful to listen to; this week I had read too much Cicero from book two and the last book of Tusculan Disputations, and I got carried away wanting to argue with him.

We missed Don in this episode but are hoping to have him back next week.

Post by “Cassius” of June 8, 2023 at 7:32 AM

Episode 177 of the podcast is now available!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/54137943>

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