

Episode 200 - Lucretius Today 200th Episode - Retrospective, Recap, and Looking To The Future

Post by "Cassius" of October 30, 2023 at 3:04 AM

Welcome to Episode 200 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.

This week we present you a retrospective of our past work and where we plan to go in the future

Episode Topics:

- **Starting January 11, 2020**
- Episodes 1-51 were devoted to a line-by-line reading of [Lucretius' "On The Nature of Things."](#)
- **Starting January 2, 2021**
- Episodes 51-92 were devoted to a line-by-line reading of [Lucretius' "On The Nature of Things."](#)
- Episodes 93 -104 were devoted to a reading of the [Torquatus narrative of Epicurean Philosophy](#) from Cicero's "On Ends."
- **Starting January 7, 2022**
- Episodes 104 -111 were devoted to a reading of the [Torquatus narrative of Epicurean Philosophy](#) from Cicero's "On Ends."
- Episodes 112 -125 were devoted to [Epicurus' Letter to Herodotus](#).
- Episodes 127 -133 were devoted to [Epicurus' Letter to Pythocles](#).
- Episodes [134](#) -140 were devoted to [Epicurus' Letter to Menoeceus](#).
- Episodes 141 -144 were devoted to [Diogenes of Oinoanda](#).
- Episodes 145 - 154 were been devoted to a book review of Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy."
- **Starting January 2, 2023**
- Episodes 155 - 189 were been devoted to continued review of Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus and His Philosophy."
- Episodes 156 -157 were devoted to an interview of **Dr. Emily Austin**, author of "Living For Pleasure."

- Episode 166 of was devoted to an interview with **Dr. David Glidden** on Epicurean Prolepsis.
- Episodes 190 through the present have been devoted to a detailed review of Cicero's On Ends Books One and Two.
- Episode 197 was devoted to an interview with **Dr. Marcello Boeri**, co-author of the book "Epicurean Political Philosophy - Theory and Practice."

I think the topics you suggested earlier don make the most sense.

I'll introduce the session as a retrospective of this being our 200th episode and then we can discuss much of what you suggested:

- Opening thanks to all podcasters and listeners and those who participated by asking questions and leaving comments on the forum
- We'll looking back at the different series that we undertook
 - Lucretius
 - Letters of Epicurus
 - Diogenes of Oinoanda
 - The Torquatus narrative
 - Book Two of On Ends
 - The Dewitt Book
 - The Interviews
 - Emily Austin
 - David Glidden
 - Marcello Boeri
 - A Few Days In Athens (not official part of the podcast series but closely tangential)
 - Our recommendations for sequence of reading
 - List of controversial philosophical issues that still need exploring ways to state them better
 - The proper perspective on reason and propositional logic
 - The proper perspective on "length of life" issues (how long to live?)
 - The proper perspective on whether there is any objective way to rank or decide among pleasure (including katastematic and kinetic) or is it all purely personal?
 - The proper meaning of "absence of pain" (all feelings which are not pain are pleasure?)
 - Others?
 - *Challenges*
 - Keeping the focus on big picture issues and not pursuing too many rabbits too far down their holes.
 - Accommodating people who are just beginning to read Epicurus while also holding interest of those who are experienced

- Avoiding eclecticism and combination with Stoicism, Buddhism, "Humanism," etc.
- Deferring and diverting to other places divisive local (partisan political) issues that are not truly part of the core philosophy (applying a "no politics" rule to discussions while also acknowledging that individual action in "local" issues is a necessary part of life)
- Avoiding Frances Wright burnout / shooting star syndrome
- *Future plans*
 - Supporting an ongoing "scheme of contemplation" in the form of a structure of daily reading or other participation that reinforces good habits
 - Organizing access to hard-to-find texts and fragments
 - Encouraging wider personal participation by those who wish to pursue it
 - Sustaining the effort over time as older participants retire or pass away
 - Interesting people in Epicurus at a younger age
 - "Advertising" or getting word of the project out beyond our current audience
 - Use of Facebook or other social media and other options.

We're planning a special episode for our 200th podcast, to be recorded on November 5, 2023.

In the meantime, here's an amateurish video put together before we started, in October of 2019. Maybe in the future we can do a better one.

I bet some of you didn't realize that our theme song has a middle section!

<https://youtu.be/bkoS6Rb5z04>

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57584963>

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2023 at 6:03 AM

One of the things I would like to see us discuss in this episode is something to the effect of the "transformational power of studying the texts," and here is an example:

When you combine our recent discussions about pleasure including both the "stimulation kind of pleasure" and the "appreciation of being alive-and-not-in-pain kind of pleasure," I think from here on I am never going to see the opening of Books One and Two of Lucretius as I did before.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3462-episode-200-lucretius-today-200th-episode-retrospective-recap-and-looking-to-the/>

Formerly I saw the opening of book one as a "hymn to Venus," which seems a nice way to label it but out of place in a non-religious book. And I formerly saw the "it is sweet to observe the shipwrecks of the fools" as kind of weird, and as Joshua and others often note, a little off-putting and lacking in compassion. I remember us discussing this with Emily Austin as even seeing it as a "slip" of Lucretius not being on his best form.

At this point, after all our discussions, I think from here on I am going to see these two openings as illustrating these two aspects of pleasure from which Dewitt concludes "The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism."

From that perspective, I think we can see Lucretius giving a shockingly prominent position in his poem to hammering home this point about Epicurus' innovation: The two openings show how pleasure comes both through (1) the stimulations of Venus (toward sex and trade on the oceans and all the other activities that we pursue at the leading of pleasure), as well as through (2) the workings of our mind through true philosophy which lead us to appreciate how great a pleasure it is to be alive when we are free from disaster. This is a type of gladness that can come only through "scheme of systematic contemplation" and the mind being prepared to figure these things out, which alone can give us "the confident expectation of their continuance."

For most of the close to fifteen years of my reading of Lucretius and Epicurean texts I don't think I would have noticed, much less appreciated, that these parallels could be drawn in the way Lucretius is structuring his poem.

Rather than seeing the poem as mainly a dry physics discussion that focuses on the gods being natural ([PD01](#)) and there being no existence after death ([PD02](#)), you can also see the poem as hammering home this point about the extension of the concept of pleasure being everything going on when we are not in pain ([PD03](#)). Rather than seeing Venus' calming influence on Mars in the opening of book one as a weirdly inappropriate thing for an "anti-religious" poet to say, we can see that too as an application of [PD04](#), in which we have access to pleasure to allow us to offset and endure the pains that sometimes come upon us. Venus calming Mars reflects Epicurus' use of gladness of mind to calm the pains of his disease.

Whether these observations are what was in Lucretius' mind or not, I think they are useful, and they would never have occurred to me to consider in the same way before we focused so much attention on these issues. You just aren't going to get that kind of appreciation of what is going on without study into the deeper aspects of the philosophy, just like the "light of day" isn't good enough to observe on its own without appreciating what it illuminates.

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2023 at 6:20 AM

Another aspect that I am still rolling over in my mind is the difficulty (at least for me) in applying the "absence of pain" terminology to both (1) my general summation and assessment of my condition which includes both pleasures and pains, and (2) an individual sensation / feeling which can be either pleasure or pain but not both or neither.

I personally (and I do not think I am alone) have a strong tendency to interpret "absence of pain" as conveying a focus on a general assessment in which "unless every ounce of pain is eliminated from my life then I haven't achieved anything." That perspective is akin to the Judeo-Christian attitude that we are worms because we all sin and fall short of the glory of god, or the Stoic attitude that "unless we've reached the summit of the mountain all our mountain-climbing is for nothing."

I'm of the view that this perfectionist "all or nothing" attitude is so baked in the cake of modern religion and philosophy that it makes it very hard to even comprehend any other approach. The detailed analysis of the individual feelings and experiences of a variety of pleasures leads me to conclude that to Epicurus it's not a perfect result of "pure pleasure" that is the main thing (other than as a goal), but the moment-by-moment achievement of the best we can do under our own circumstances to ensure the predominance of feelings of pleasure over feelings of pain. Epicurus wasn't experiencing "pure pleasure" on the last day of his life, but up to the end he was doing the best he could to summon up pleasure to override pain, just as Lucretius analogizes Venus calming Mars.

The only way to break out of the "all or nothing" perspective is to engage in the scheme of systematic study, preferably with others "like ourselves" as Epicurus recommends.

Post by “Lowri834” of November 4, 2023 at 9:47 AM

I've just started reading Lucretius, the Martin Ferguson Smith translation. There were two items in his footnotes to the opening that your post seem to align with. "She (Venus) also personifies pleasure, the attainment of which, according to Epicureans, is the object of human life." and "... reinforce Lucr.'s view that, just as Venus is the bringer of life, light and clam into the physical world, so Epicurus is the bringer of light and calm into the spiritual world." When I read it I thought of "calm" as the "appreciation of being alive-and-not-in-pain kind of pleasure" you mention.

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2023 at 10:09 AM

[Quote from Lowri834](#)

I've just started reading Lucretius, the Martin Ferguson Smith translation.

Thanks for the comment, and that's a good choice of translations. We don't tend to talk about his that often, probably because it's one of the more recent and still in copyright, but his is probably the current best for pure scholarship.

Post by “Cassius” of November 9, 2023 at 9:15 PM

Episode 200 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is Now Available! This week is our special 200th Episode Retrospective and Recap, and we hope you enjoy our review of where we've been and where we plan to go. Special treat - Don rejoins us for this episode!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/57584963>

Post by “Cassius” of November 9, 2023 at 9:41 PM

Early in the episode Kalosyni mentions the Charlton Griffin reading of Rolfe Humphries' edition of Lucretius.

Here is one source for that:

<https://www.amazon.com/On-Nature-of-Things-Lucretius-audiobook>

Also:

<https://www.audible.com/pd/On-the-Nature-of-Things-Audiobook/B002UZ528>

Post by “Cassius” of November 9, 2023 at 11:11 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3462-episode-200-lucretius-today-200th-episode-retrospective-recap-and-looking-to-the/>

Shortly the episode will be available here on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PCr7W9XW0E>

Post by “Cassius” of November 10, 2023 at 1:55 PM

I may re-record my ending because unfortunately I was away from base when I did it, and the mike sounds a lot different, but other than that I think this is a good episode and likely one we will point new listeners to in the future.

We left some loose ends to address in the thread, especially as to "where to start reading" but perhaps we can fill in that gap as people comment after listening.

Post by “Don” of November 10, 2023 at 7:05 PM

By Zeus, that turned into a good episode, if I do say! Excellent editing in post-production! It was an enjoyable, wide-ranging conversation. Thanks for letting me be a part of it!

Post by “Don” of November 10, 2023 at 10:24 PM

Joshua mentioned Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 215:

Thread

[Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 215](#)

I was working through Les Epicuriens before I have to return the interlibrary loan book and came across this in the section of Epicurus' writings. I was not aware of Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 215, but it appears to possibly be an unknown text of Epicurus although some scholars debate this attribution. It could just be a section of a known work that doesn't have the title at the end, too. It is definitely an Epicurean text, that's not debated.

The "O man" translation part includes ὦ] ἄνθρωπε,...

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3462-episode-200-lucretius-today-200th-episode-retrospective-recap-and-looking-to-the/>



Don

August 16, 2022 at 3:53 PM

Post by “Cassius” of November 11, 2023 at 10:21 AM

Due to the very poor audio quality of the end of episode 200 I have re-recorded the closing started at 1:11:22, and reposted the video youtube version as well. If anyone is interesting in hearing only the changed part, here is a [youtube link cued to the part that has been updated](https://youtu.be/2PCr7W9XW0E?si=w_wILNSU_v9i05F&t=4277):

https://youtu.be/2PCr7W9XW0E?si=w_wILNSU_v9i05F&t=4277

Post by “Don” of November 11, 2023 at 10:29 AM

Your re-recorded closing was a nice summary. 👍

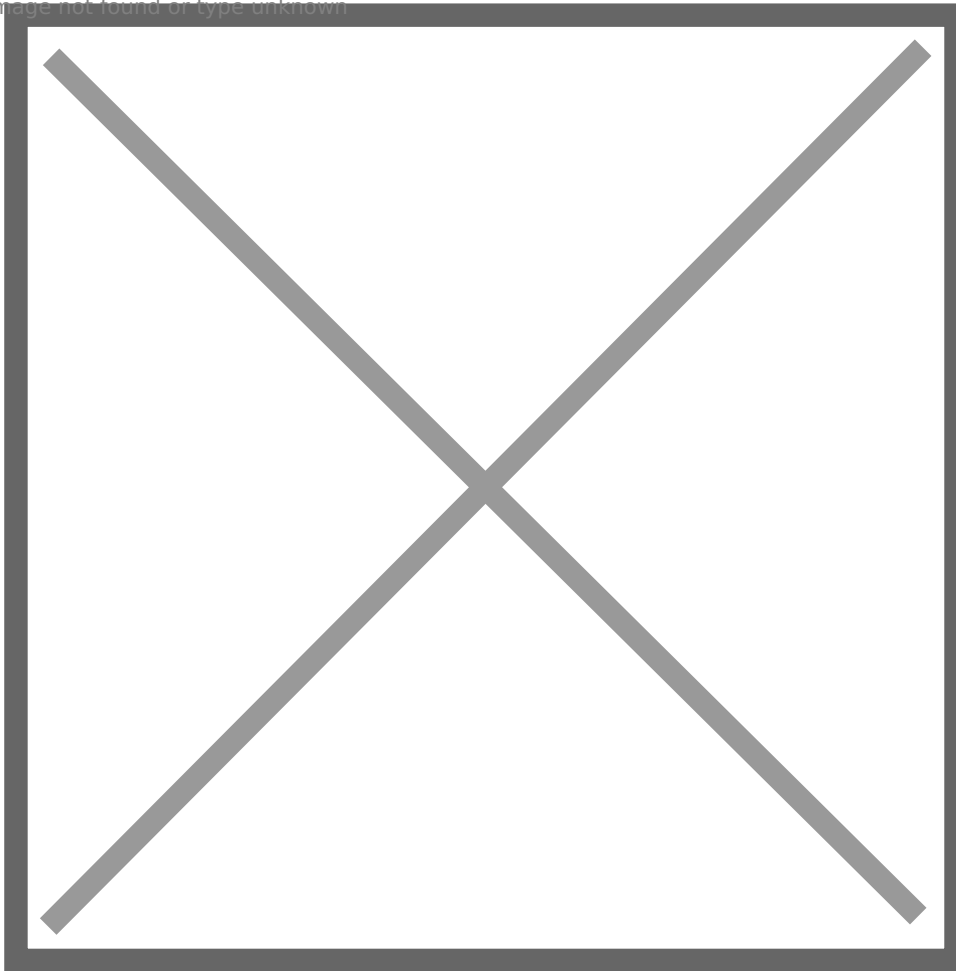
Post by “Don” of November 11, 2023 at 11:30 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Charlton Griffin reading of Rolfe Humphries' edition of Lucretius.

Some examples and excerpts:

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[Lucretius - De Rerum Natura - On the Nature of Love \(Rolfe Humphries translation\)](#)

Stream Lucretius - De Rerum Natura - On the Nature of Love (Rolfe Humphries translation) by Philosophy Monkey on desktop and mobile. Play over 320 million...
m.soundcloud.com

Also has John Dryden translation with Griffin:

[Lucretius - De Rerum Natura - On the Nature of Love](#)

Post by “Cassius” of November 11, 2023 at 1:19 PM

I note that on the Audible page for the Charlton Griffin version that the official "sample" is very good and contains one of my favorite passages, the part that starts "When human life, all too conspicuous...." .

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3462-episode-200-lucretius-today-200th-episode-retrospective-recap-and-looking-to-the/>

<https://www.audible.com/pd/On-the-Nature-of-Things-Audiobook/B002UZX528>

I see also that different video-sharing websites, such as bitchute.com, contain uploads of various editions of Lucretius.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of November 11, 2023 at 5:20 PM

Great episode I listened to it on my treadmill

Post by “Pacatus” of November 16, 2023 at 5:29 PM

What a helpful podcast all round! Itself a good place for a beginner to start. Kudos to all!

Just an immediate specific reaction:

I have heretofore found Lucretius a slog [and I generally don't - as a mostly lyric poet - relate well to long didactic (or epic, narrative) poetry]. I've pretty much read most of Lucretius now - albeit in a slapdash, patchwork way, and with less memetic absorption than would be desired. But I found [Joshua](#)'s commentary on the poem encouraging (and he knows far more about poetry per se than I ever hope to).

Post by “Pacatus” of November 16, 2023 at 6:20 PM

As so often seems to be the case, [Kalosyni](#) coined a particularly apt phrase for me: “A thought-changing way ...” Yeah, well, it's been that - to my benefit. And I relate it to [Martin](#) 's comment about perfection as opposed to the movement. And [Cassius](#) 's closing comments on pleasure and the normal state of being.

But big thanks to all!

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3462-episode-200-lucretius-today-200th-episode-retrospective-recap-and-looking-to-the/>