

# Episode 212 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 19 - Can "Pleasure" Be Defended In The Public Square?

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2024 at 12:12 PM

Welcome to Episode 212 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most 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](http://EpicureanFriends.com), where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

This week we continue our discussion of Book Two of Cicero's On Ends, which is largely devoted Cicero's attack on Epicurean Philosophy. Going through this book gives us the opportunity to review those attacks, take them apart, and respond to them as an ancient Epicurean might have done, and much more fully than Cicero allowed Torquatus, his Epicurean spokesman, to do.

Follow along with us here: [Cicero's On Ends - Complete Reid Edition](#). Check any typos or other questions against the original PDF which can be found [here](#).

This week we move into Section XXII:

XXII. Oh, but Epicurus says (this indeed is your strong point) that no one can live agreeably who does not live morally. As though I gave any heed to what he affirms or denies! The question I ask is, what statement is consistent for a man to make, who builds his highest good upon pleasure. What do you allege to shew that Thorius, that Hirrius, that Postumius, and the master of all these men, Orata, did not live very agreeable lives? He himself, as I mentioned already, asserts that the life of sybarites is not worthy of blame, unless they are utterly foolish, that is, unless they are subject to passion and fear. And when he proffers a remedy for both these conditions, he proffers immunity to sybaritism. For if these two conditions are removed, he says that he finds nothing to blame in the life of profligates. You cannot therefore, while guiding all actions by pleasure, either defend or maintain virtue. For a man who refrains from injustice only to avoid evil must not be considered a good and just man; you know of course the saying, no one is righteous, whose righteousness...; well, never suppose that any saying is truer.

He is not indeed a just man, so long as his fear lasts, and assuredly he will not be so if he ceases to fear; while he will cease to fear if he is able either to conceal or by the aid of great resources to secure anything he has done, and will undoubtedly choose to be regarded as a good man, though not really so, rather than to be good, without being considered good. So you

most disgracefully enjoin and press upon us in a kind of way a pretense of justice in the place of the true and indubitable justice; you wish us to disregard the firm ground of inner consciousness and to catch at the wandering fancies of other men. And the same statements may be made about the rest of the virtues, whose foundations, in every case, you pitch upon pleasure, as you might upon water. Well, can we call the same old Torquatus a brave man? You see I take delight, although I cannot pervert you, as you call it, I take delight, I repeat, both in your family and your name, and I declare that before my eyes there rises a vision of that most excellent man and very true friend of mine, Aulus Torquatus, whose great and conspicuous zeal for me at that crisis which is familiar to every one, must be well known to both of you; though I myself, while anxious to be and to be considered thankful, should not think such services deserving of gratitude, were it not plain to me that he was my friend for my sake and not for his own; unless by his own sake you hint at the fact that to do what is right brings advantage to all. If you mean this, I have won the victory; for what I desire and am struggling for is that duty should be duty's own reward. That philosopher of yours will not have it so, but requires pleasure from everything as a kind of fee. But I return to our old Torquatus; if it was for the sake of pleasure that he fought his combat with the Gaul on the banks of the Anio, when challenged, and if from the spoils of the foe he invested himself at once with the necklet and the title from any other motive than the feeling that such exploits beseem a man, then I do not regard him as brave. Further, if honour, if loyalty, if chastity, if in a word temperance,— if all these are to be governed by dread of retribution or of disgrace, and are not to sustain themselves by their own inherent purity, what kind of adultery, or impurity, or passion will not take its heedless and headlong course, if either concealment is promised to it, or freedom from punishment, or immunity ? Why, Torquatus, what a state of things does this seem, that you with your name, abilities and distinctions, cannot venture to confess before a public meeting your actions, your thoughts, your aims, your objects, or what that thing is from love of which you desire to carry 'your undertakings to completion, in fine what it is that you judge to be the best thing in life ? What would you be willing to take, on condition that when once you have entered on your office and risen before the assembly (you know you must announce what rules you intend to follow in your administration of the law, and perhaps too, if you think it good to do so, you will say something about your own ancestry and yourself, after the custom of our forefathers) —well then, what would you take to declare that during your term of office you will do everything with a view to pleasure, and that you have never done anything during life except with a view to pleasure? You say, do you suppose me to be such a madman as to speak before ignorant men in that fashion? But make the same statements in court, or, if you are afraid of the crowd, make them in the senate. You will never do it. Why not, unless it be that such speech is disgraceful? Do you suppose then that I and Triarius are fit persons to listen to your disgraceful talk?

XXIII. But let us grant this: the very name pleasure has no prestige, and we perhaps do not understand it; for you philosophers say over and over again, that we do not understand what kind of pleasure you mean. Surely it is a hard and abstruse subject! When you speak of atoms and spaces between universes, which do not and cannot exist, then we understand ; and can

we not understand pleasure, which every sparrow knows so well? What if I bring you to admit that I not only know what pleasure is (it is indeed an agreeable activity affecting the sense) but what you intend it to be? At one time you intend it to mean exactly what I just now indicated, and imply by the name that it is something active, and produces a certain variation ; at another time you speak of a certain other supreme pleasure, which is incapable of increase ; this you say is present when all pain is absent; this you call stable pleasure. Let us grant that this is pleasure. State before any public meeting you like that you do everything with a view to avoiding pain. If you think that even this statement cannot be made with proper honour and dignity, say that both during your term of office and your whole life you intend always to act with an eye to your interest, doing nothing but what is profitable, nothing in fine except for your own private sake; what kind of uproar do you think there will be, or what hope will you have of the consulship, which is now very well assured to you? Do you mean then to follow a system such that you adopt it when alone and in the company of your friends but do not venture to proclaim it or make it public? But in reality when you attend the courts or the senate you have always on your lips the language of the Peripatetics and the Stoics. Duty and equity, honour and loyalty, uprightness and morality, everything worthy of the empire and the Roman people, all kind of dangers to be faced for the commonwealth, death due to our country,—when you talk in this strain, we simpletons are overcome, but you I suppose laugh in your sleeve. Verily among these phrases, splendid and noble as they are, no place is found for pleasure, not merely for that pleasure which you philosophers say lies in activity, which all men in town and country, all I say, who speak Latin, call pleasure, but even for this stable pleasure, which no one but you entitles pleasure.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58499251>

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## **Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2024 at 7:30 PM**

This episode of Lucretius Today is going to take on Cicero's allegation that it is impossible to proclaim Epicurean philosophy in the halls of government or in the courts - basically in any public forum. This is a very important challenge that is very important to consider and refute. Let us know your thoughts and we will include them in the episode! And don't say that "Epicureans wouldn't be involved in politics." This is much deeper than that - it is a challenge that you can't ever proclaim your devotion to 'pleasure' as the goal of life in public without being disgraced by the admission.

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3673-episode-212-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-19-can-pleasure-be-defended-in-the-pu/>

What would you be willing to take, on condition that when once you have entered on your office and risen before the assembly (you know you must announce what rules you intend to follow in your administration of the law, and perhaps too, if you think it good to do so, you will say something about your own ancestry and yourself, after the custom of our forefathers)—well then, what would you take to declare that during your term of office you will do everything with a view to pleasure, and that you have never done anything during life except with a view to pleasure?

You say, do you suppose me to be such a madman as to speak before ignorant men in that fashion? But make the same statements in court, or, if you are afraid of the crowd, make them in the senate. You will never do it. Why not, unless it be that such speech is disgraceful? Do you suppose then that I and Triarius are fit persons to listen to your disgraceful talk?

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2024 at 6:29 AM

In dealing with Cicero's charge that it essentially impossible to stand up for Epicurean pleasure in public life, I want to be sure to include this as example of how to do so: Cassius Longinus standing up for Epicurus in his letters to Cicero, as well as Cicero's own admission that he may have underestimated Epicureanism. This text is from [Attalus.org](https://www.attalus.org/):

### [15.19] Cassius to Cicero

[Brundisium, latter half of January, 45 B.C.]

L I hope that you are well. I assure you that on this tour of mine there is nothing that gives me more pleasure to do than to write to you; for I seem to be talking and joking with you face to face. And yet that does not come to pass because of those spectres; and, by way of retaliation for that, in my next letter I shall let loose upon you such a rabble of [Stoic](#) boors that you will proclaim Catius a true-born Athenian.

2 I am glad that our friend Pansa was sped on his way by universal goodwill when he left the city in military uniform, and that not only on my own account, but also, most assuredly, on that of all our friends. For I hope that men generally will come to understand how much all the world hates cruelty, and how much it loves integrity and clemency, and that the blessings most eagerly sought and coveted by the bad ultimately find their way to the good. For it is hard to convince men that "the good is to be chosen for its own sake"; but that pleasure and

tranquillity of mind is acquired by virtue, justice, and the good is both true and demonstrable. Why, Epicurus himself, from whom all the Catiuses and Amafiniuses in the world, incompetent translators of terms as they are, derive their origin, lays it down that "to live a life of pleasure is impossible without living a life of virtue and justice".

3 Consequently Pansa, who follows pleasure, keeps his hold on virtue, and those also whom you call pleasure-lovers are lovers of what is good and lovers of justice, and cultivate and keep all the virtues. And so Sulla, whose judgment we ought to accept, when he saw that the philosophers were at sixes and sevens, did not investigate the nature of the good, but bought up all the goods there were; and I frankly confess that I bore his death without flinching. Caesar, however, will not let us feel his loss too long; for he has a lot of condemned men to restore to us in his stead, nor will he himself feel the lack of someone to bid at his auctions when once he has cast his eye on Sulla junior.

4 And now to return to politics; please write back and tell me what is being done in the two Spains. I am terribly full of anxiety, and I would sooner have the old and lenient master [Caesar], than make trial of a new and cruel one. You know what an idiot [Gnaeus](#) is; you know how he deems cruelty a virtue; you know how he thinks that we have always scoffed at him. I fear that in his boorish way he will be inclined to reply by wiping our turned-up noses with the sword. Write back as you love me, and tell me what is doing. Ah! how I should like to know whether you read all this with an anxious mind or a mind at ease! For I should know at the same time what it is my duty to do. Not to be too long-winded, I bid you farewell. Continue to love me as you do. If Caesar has conquered, expect me to return quickly.

FROM THE LETTER THAT PRECEDED THE ONE JUST QUOTED:

[15.16] **Cicero to Cassius**

[Rome, January, 45 B.C.]

LI expect you must be just a little ashamed of yourself now that this is the third letter that has caught you before you have sent me a single leaf or even a line. But I am not pressing you, for I shall look forward to, or rather insist upon, a longer letter. As for myself, if I always had somebody to trust with them, I should send you as many as three an hour. For it somehow happens, that whenever I write anything to you, you seem to be at my very elbow; and that, not by way of visions of images, as your new friends term them, who believe that even mental visions are conjured up by what [Caius](#) calls spectres (for let me remind you that Caius the [Insubrian](#), an [Epicurean](#), who died lately, gives the name of spectres to what the famous [Gargettian](#) [Epicurus], and long before that [Democritus](#), called images).

2 But, even supposing that the eye can be struck by these spectres because they run up against it quite of their own accord, how the mind can be so struck is more than I can see. It will be your duty to explain to me, when you arrive here safe and sound, whether the spectre of

you is at my command to come up as soon as the whim has taken me to think about you - and not only about you, who always occupy my inmost heart, but suppose I begin thinking about the Isle of [Britain](#), will the image of that wing its way to my consciousness?

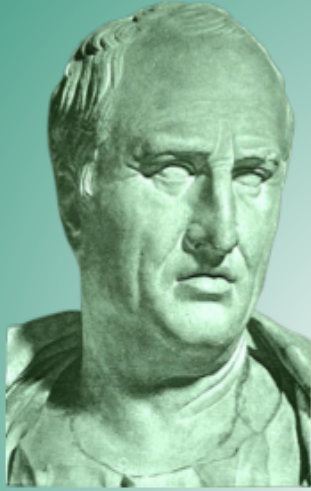
3 But of this later on. I am only sounding you now to see in what spirit you take it. For if you are angry and annoyed, I shall have more to say, and shall insist upon your being reinstated in that school of philosophy, out of which you have been ousted "by violence and an armed force." In this formula the words "within this year" are not usually added; so even if it is now two or three years since, bewitched by the blandishments of Pleasure, you sent a notice of divorce to Virtue, I am free to act as I like. And yet to whom am I talking? To you, the most gallant gentleman in the world, who, ever since you set foot in the forum, have done nothing but what bears every mark of the most impressive distinction. Why, in that very school you have selected I apprehend there is more vitality than I should have supposed, if only because it has your approval. "How did the whole subject occur to you?" you will say. Because I had nothing else to write. About politics I can write nothing, for I do not care to write what I feel.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 29, 2024 at 8:42 PM**

This is not a very creative graphic, but I had to do something to memorialize this line from On Ends Book 2 that we are discussing in this week's episode. Cicero's sarcastic line not only helps emphasize the importance of the philosophical definition of pleasure, but it's also probably a good way to think about animals consider pleasure to be.

# Who Knows More About Pleasure?



But let us grant this: the very name pleasure has no prestige, and we perhaps do not understand it; for you [Epicurean] philosophers say over and over again, that we do not understand what kind of pleasure you mean. Surely it is a hard and abstruse subject! When you speak of atoms and spaces between universes, which do not and cannot exist, then we understand; and can we not understand pleasure, which every sparrow knows so well? (On Ends Book 2:XXIII)

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2024 at 7:16 AM

Episode 212 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we take up Cicero's allegation that a philosophy of pleasure is so disgraceful that it cannot be proclaimed in the Senate, in Court, or in public at all.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/58499251>

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## Post by “Joshua” of January 30, 2024 at 11:18 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3673-episode-212-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-19-can-pleasure-be-defended-in-the-pu/>

The citations from the letters of Cicero to Cassius Longinus were very appropriate to this discussion, so thank you [Cassius](#) !

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 30, 2024 at 11:59 AM**

I think at least for those of us in America an opening statement of our intent to conduct ourselves in our public role as an Epicurean would remind everyone that someone somewhere once said something about all of us possessing the "right to life, liberty, and the *pursuit of happiness*."

One might then need to do some Oenoanda-style "shouting" about how a life of happiness is a life of pleasure, but that would still be a good start, I think. 😊