

Episode 219 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 26 - Cicero Continues His Attack On Epicurus' Position On Pain

Post by "Cassius" of March 10, 2024 at 2:30 PM

Welcome to Episode 219 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, 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](#).

Last week we focused on Cicero's allegation that luck places the happy life out of reach of many Epicureans. This week we pick up at the start of Section XXIX - REID EDITION -

XXIX. Again when you say that great pain is short, while prolonged pain is light, I do not understand what it is that you mean. For I am acquainted with instances where pains were not only great but also prolonged for a considerable time; and yet for enduring them there is another and truer method, of which you who do not love morality for its own sake cannot avail yourselves. There are certain maxims, and I might almost say enactments, concerning courage, which prohibit a man from being womanish in the midst of pain. So we must think it disgraceful, I do not say to feel pain (for that certainly is occasionally inevitable) but to make that old rock of Lemnus ghostly with the roarings of a Philoctetes, *which, by echoing back the shriekings, cryings, groanings, sighings, dumb though it be, returns the sounds of lamentation.*

Let Epicurus chant his prophecy to such an one, if he can, one whose veins within him, tainted with poison from the serpent's tooth, bubble with foul torments. Says Epicurus: hush, Philoctetes, your pain is short. But for nearly ten years already he has been lying sick in his cave. If 'tis long 'tis light; for it has its pauses, and sometimes slackens. First, it is not often so; next what is this slackening worth, when not only is the recollection of past pain fresh in the

mind, but the dread of future and imminent pain causes a torment? Let the man die, says he. Perhaps it is best so, but what becomes of your saying there is always a balance of pleasure? For if that is true, see that you be not committing a crime in advising death. Rather hold language such as this, namely, that it is disgraceful, that it is unmanly to be weakened by pain, to be broken by it and conquered. For your maxim "if 'tis hard, 'tis short, if 'tis long, 'tis light," are a mere parrot's lesson. Pain is usually assuaged by the soothing application of virtue, I mean loftiness of spirit, endurance and courage.

XXX. Not to digress too far, hear what Epicurus says on his death-bed, that you may perceive how his actions are at variance with his maxims: Epicurus wishes health to Hermarchus. I write this letter (he says) while passing a happy day, and the last of my life. Pains in the bladder and intestines are upon me, so severe that their intensity cannot be increased. Wretched creature! If pain is the greatest of evils we cannot call him anything else. But let us listen to the man himself. Still, all these are outweighed, he says, by elation of mind arising from the recollection of my theories and discoveries. But do you, as befits the feelings you have entertained from your youth up for me and for philosophy, remember to protect the children of Metrodorus.

After this I do not admire the death of Epaminondas or of Leonidas more than this man's death; though one of these, after winning a victory over the Lacedaemonians at Mantinea, and finding that his life was ebbing away, owing to a serious wound, asked, as soon as he saw how things stood, whether his shield was safe. When his weeping comrades had answered that it was, he asked whether the enemy had been routed. When he heard that this too was as he desired, he ordered that the spear which had pierced him should be extracted. So he died from the copious flow of blood, in a moment of exultation and victory.

Leonidas again, the king of the Lacedaemonians, along with the three hundred men whom he had led from Sparta, when the choice lay between a base retreat and a splendid death, confronted the enemy at Thermopylae. The deaths of generals are celebrated, while philosophers mostly die in their beds. Still it makes a difference how they die. This philosopher thought himself happy at the moment of death. A great credit to him. My intense pains, he says, are outweighed by elation of mind. The voice I hear is indeed that of a true philosopher, Epicurus, but you have forgotten what you ought to say. For, first, if there is truth in those matters which you say it causes you joy to recall, I mean, if your writings and discoveries are true, you cannot feel joy, since you now possess no blessing which you can set down to the account of the body; whereas you have always told us that no one can feel joy unless on account of the body, nor pain either. I feel joy in my past joys, he tells me. What past joys? If you say those relating to the body, I read that you set against your pains your philosophical theories, and not any recollection of pleasures enjoyed by the body; if you say those relating to the mind, then your maxim is untrue, that there is no joy of the mind, which has not a relation to the body. Why after that do you give a commission about the children of Metrodorus? What is there about your admirable goodness and extreme loyalty (for so I judge it to be) that you connect with the body?

Post by “Cassius” of March 16, 2024 at 1:41 PM

We will be continuing in this episode 219 with Cicero's criticisms of Epicurus' views of pain. This is a very challenging topic, so if anyone has any thoughts we should consider prior to the recording, please add them here.

Cicero's first criticism revolves this that is recorded from Diogenes Laertius:

[118] And even if the wise man be put on the rack, he is happy. Only the wise man will show gratitude, and will constantly speak well of his friends alike in their presence and their absence. Yet when he is on the rack, then he will cry out and lament.

Seemingly, exactly to the contrary, Cicero says: "There are certain maxims, and I might almost say enactments, concerning courage, which prohibit a man from being womanish in the midst of pain. So we must think it disgraceful, I do not say to feel pain (for that certainly is occasionally inevitable) but to make that old rock of Lemnus ghostly with the roarings of a Philoctetes, *which, by echoing back the shriekings, cryings, groanings, sighings, dumb though it be, returns the sounds of lamentation.*

It is really interesting how Cicero's criticisms track points that are also included by Diogenes Laertius some hundreds of years after Cicero's time, almost as if they were going by exactly the same sources of material despite the difference in time when they were writing.

The full text of Cicero's criticism is in the first post of this thread:

Post

[**Episode 219 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 26 -Cicero Continues His Attack On Epicurus' Position On Pain**](#)

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Cassius

March 10, 2024 at 2:30 PM

Post by “Cassius” of March 16, 2024 at 1:56 PM

I was talking to [Kalosyni](#) earlier today and it is my understanding that she is going to post regardin the topic for our discussion on the 20th zoom that will be relevant to our discussion of pain, including how Epicurus frees us from the fear of eternal pain. Here are several relevant quotes:

Lucretius Book 1: [102] You yourself sometime vanquished by the fearsome threats of the seer’s sayings, will seek to desert from us. Nay indeed, how many a dream may they even now conjure up before you, which might avail to overthrow your schemes of life, and confound in fear all your fortunes. And justly so: for if men could see that there is a fixed limit to their sorrows, then with some reason they might have the strength to stand against the scruples of religion, and the threats of seers. As it is there is no means, no power to withstand, since everlasting is the punishment they must fear in death.

Nietzsche "Antichrist" Section 58: "The sneakishness of hypocrisy, the secrecy of the conventicle, concepts as black as hell, such as the sacrifice of the innocent, the unio mystica in the drinking of blood, above all, the slowly rekindled fire of revenge, of Chandala revenge—all that sort of thing became master of Rome: the same kind of religion which, in a pre-existent form, Epicurus had combatted. One has but to read Lucretius to know what Epicurus made war upon—not paganism, but "Christianity", which is to say, the corruption of souls by means of the concepts of guilt, punishment and immortality.—He combatted the subterranean cults, the whole of latent Christianity—to deny immortality was already a form of genuine salvation."

Lucretius Book 3 - [01] ... For as soon as thy philosophy, springing from thy godlike soul, begins to proclaim aloud the nature of things, the terrors of the mind fly away, the walls of the world part asunder, I see things moving on through all the void. The majesty of the gods is revealed, and their peaceful abodes, which neither the winds shake nor clouds soak with showers, nor does the snow congealed with biting frost besmirch them with its white fall, but an ever cloudless sky vaults them over, and smiles with light bounteously spread abroad. Moreover, nature supplies all they need, nor does anything gnaw at their peace of mind at any time. But on the other hand, the quarters of Acheron are nowhere to be seen....,

Lucretius Book 3 - [74] In like manner, often through the same fear, they waste with envy that he is powerful, he is regarded, who walks clothed with bright renown; while they complain that they themselves are wrapped in darkness and the mire. Some of them come to ruin to win

statues and a name; and often through fear of death so deeply does the hatred of life and the sight of the light possess men, that with sorrowing heart they compass their own death, forgetting that it is this fear which is the source of their woes, which assails their honour, which bursts the bonds of friendship, and overturns affection from its lofty throne. For often ere now men have betrayed country and beloved parents, seeking to shun the realms of Acheron.

Lucretius Book 3 - [978] Yea, we may be sure, all those things, of which stories tell us in the depths of Acheron, are in our life. Neither does wretched Tantalus fear the great rock that hangs over him in the air, as the tale tells, numbed with idle terror; but rather 'tis in life that the vain fear of the gods threatens mortals; they fear the fall of the blow which chance may deal to each. [984] Nor do birds make their way into Tityos, as he lies in Acheron, nor can they verily in all the length of time find food to grope for deep in his huge breast. However vast the mass of his outstretched limbs, though he cover not only nine acres with his sprawling limbs, but the whole circle of earth, yet he will not be able to endure everlasting pain, nor for ever to supply food from his own body. But this is our Tityos, whom as he lies smitten with love the birds mangle, yea, aching anguish devours him, or care cuts him deep through some other passion.

There are probably other quotes on how Epicurus frees us from fear of eternal torment, so if others have similar quotes please add them here.

Post by “Cassius” of March 17, 2024 at 8:46 AM

In addition to the above quotes I think we can include the statements made by Julius Caesar, as a result of which he was accused of being an Epicurean, that the Cataline Conspirators should not be sentenced to death, but to prison, because death is a relief from punishment. Here is where Caesar says this as recorded by Sallust:

[LacusCurtius • Sallust — The War With Catiline](#)

15 [\[Legamen ad paginam Latinam\]](#) "For my own part, Fathers of the Senate, I consider no tortures sufficient for the crimes of these men; but most mortals remember only that which happens last, and in the case of godless men forget their guilt and descant upon the punishment they have received, if it is a little more severe than common. 16 I have no doubt that Decimus Silanus, a gallant and brave man, was led by patriotism to say what he did say, and that in a matter of such moment he showed neither favour nor enmity; so well do I know the man's character and moderation. 17 Yet his proposal seems to me, I will not say cruel (for what could be cruel in the case of such men?) but foreign to the customs of our country. 18 For surely, Silanus, it was either fear or the gravity of the offence which impelled you, a consul

elect, to favour a novel form of punishment. 19 As regards fear it is needless to speak, especially since, thanks to the precautions of our distinguished consul, we have such strong guards under arms. 20 So far as the penalty is concerned, I can say with truth that amid grief and wretchedness death is a relief from woes, not a punishment; that it puts an end to all mortal ills and leaves no room either for sorrow or for joy.

Post by “Cassius” of March 17, 2024 at 8:52 AM

I need to check my sources on the accusations against Caesar resulting from this speech. I think I have read that Cicero made them, but in Sallust here is what comes from Cato;

13 [Legamen ad paginam Latinam] "In fine and finished phrases did Gaius Caesar a moment ago before this body speak of life and death, regarding as false, I presume, the tales which are told of the Lower World, where they say that the wicked take a different path from the good, and dwell in regions that are gloomy, desolate, unsightly, and full of fears.

Post by “Cassius” of March 17, 2024 at 9:19 AM

From "Epicurus In Rome" - Part 1, Chapter 5 - Caesar the Epicurean? A Matter of Life and Death

Scholars have often pointed to and that concerns Caesar's attitude to death. According to Epicurus, of course, fear of death is – together with fear of the gods – the main obstacle to attaining a happy life, and a person cannot achieve ἀταραξία without having internalized the truth that “death is nothing to us” (ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, KD 1). Whatever his other philosophical beliefs may or may not have been, Caesar on a number of occasions displayed a contempt for death that might be seen as at least Epicurean-inflected. Passing over his well-attested physical courage and death-defying acts during his military campaigns, I will concentrate in what follows on a few attested utterances, which combine to allow perhaps some insight into Caesar's views on life and death.

The first is an argument Caesar reportedly made in his speech on December 5, 63 BC, when the senate debated the fate of the convicted

Catilinarians. After the consul-designate Silanus had proposed the death penalty and the subsequent speakers had seconded his motion, Caesar suggested instead lifelong imprisonment without the possibility of parole. While the greater part of his speech as reconstructed by Sallust in his *War against Catiline* is concerned with cautioning the senators against approving a measure of questionable legality, Caesar also offers a striking argument against the death penalty itself (Sall. BC 51.20):

de poena possum equidem dicere, id quod res habet, in luctu atque miseriis mortem aerumnarum requiem, non cruciatum esse; eam cuncta mortalium mala dissolvere; ultra neque curae neque gaudio locum esse.

About the punishment I can speak according to the facts: in sorrow and misery death is a relief from grief, not a torture. It dissolves all human ills, and beyond it, there is place for neither care nor joy.

While Sallust is not quoting Caesar verbatim, he presumably availed himself of the senatorial archives in reconstructing the speeches,^[1] and the historicity of the remarks on death is confirmed not only by the fact that Sallust's Cato, in responding to Caesar, refers back to them, but crucially also by Cicero's own summary of the discussion in the fourth speech *Against Catiline*. As for Cato, he begins his attack on Caesar's proposal as follows (Sall. BC 52.13):

C. Caesar a little while ago gave this order a well-phrased and well-structured lecture on life and death, apparently deeming false what is said about the underworld, namely, that divorced from the good, the wicked inhabit horrid, desolate, foul and fearful places.

Cicero, finally, paraphrases Caesar's views on death as follows (Cat. 4.7-8):

The other speaker understands that death was not created by the immortal gods for the sake of punishment, but is either a necessity of nature or freedom from toil and misery. Thus wise men have never undergone it unwillingly, and brave men have often even willingly sought it ... He leaves only life to the criminals. If he had taken that away, he would have removed with one single pain many miseries of mind and body as well as all punishments for their crimes. Therefore, in order that there be some fear left in life for wicked men, those men of old maintained that there were some punishments of this sort set for the impious in the underworld—since of course they understood that without them, not even death would have to be feared.

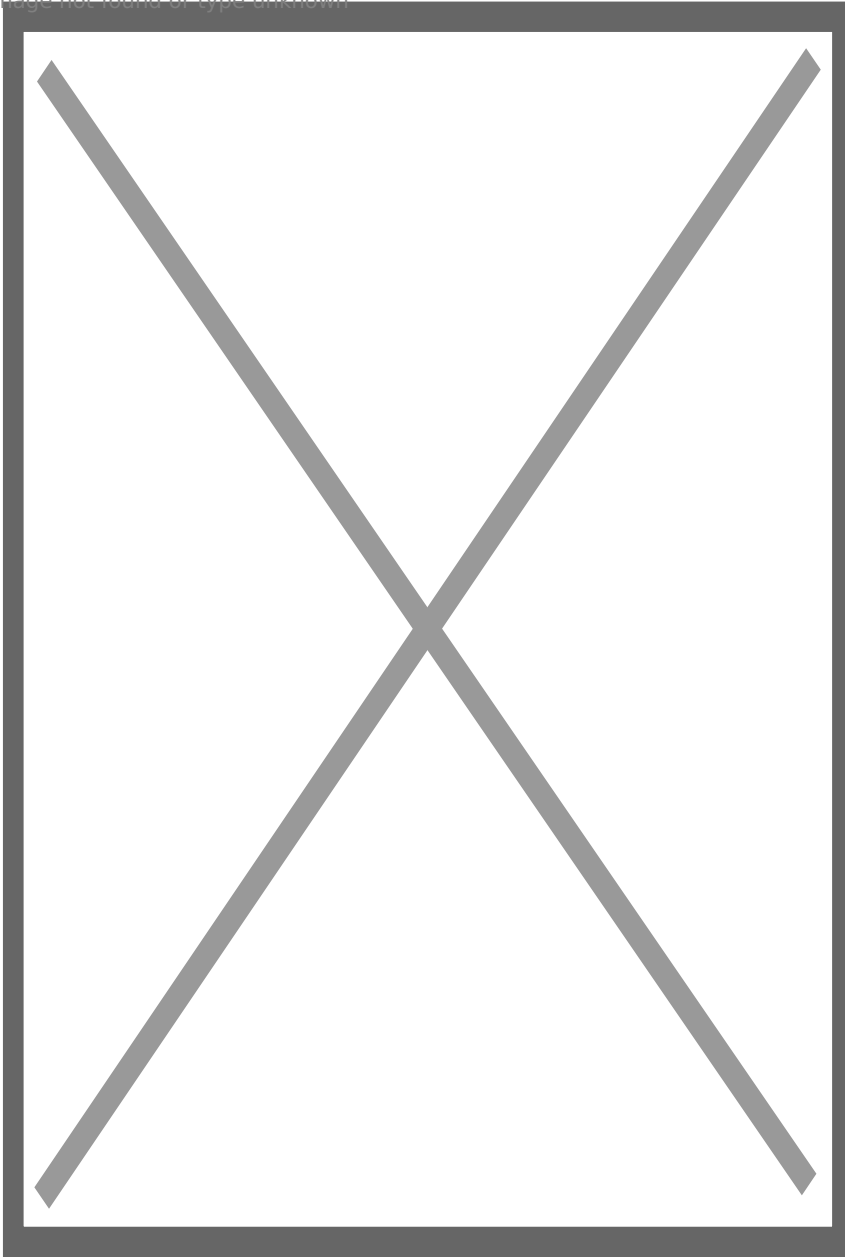
Even though Caesar's and Cato's words are filtered through Sallust, and it is unclear to what extent Cicero is distorting or embellishing Caesar's argument, there still emerges a reasonably clear image of what Caesar must have said. Apparently, he claimed that the death penalty was not a suitable punishment because death

constitutes the absolute endpoint for human experience beyond which a person will be affected by neither good nor ill – and certainly not the punishments of the traditional underworld. As a result, death is not to be feared (*non esse mortem ipsam pertimescendam*, Cic. Cat. 4.8).

Post by “Cassius” of March 17, 2024 at 1:55 PM

It looks to me like "Epicurus in Rome" has changed status and is now available for free download directly from Cambridge.org. Can someone verify?

Image not found or type unknown



[Epicurus in Rome](#)

Cambridge Core - Ancient Philosophy - Epicurus in Rome
www.cambridge.org

Post by “Don” of March 17, 2024 at 2:08 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3748-episode-219-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-26-cicero-continues-his-attack-on-epi/>

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Edited by [Sergio Yona](#), *University of Missouri, Columbia*, [Gregson Davis](#), *Duke University, North Carolina*

Post by “Cassius” of March 17, 2024 at 2:31 PM

Don do you know how that happens? Seems like I remember it being \$50 plus very recently. Limited time perhaps?

Post by “Don” of March 17, 2024 at 2:37 PM

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Post by “Don” of March 17, 2024 at 2:40 PM

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(It's a similar license under which I released the Menoikeus commentary. Mine has: This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>)

Post by “Joshua” of March 17, 2024 at 5:11 PM

Very cool! There are some good articles in that book, I'm happy to see it accessible to a wider audience!

Post by “Cassius” of March 23, 2024 at 5:52 AM

Lucretius Today Podcast Episode 219 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 26 - "**Cicero Continues His Attack On Epicurus' Position On Pain**" Is Now Available -

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/59145889>

Post by “Titus” of April 5, 2024 at 3:55 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3748-episode-219-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-26-cicero-continues-his-attack-on-epi/>

Very cool! There are some good articles in that book, I'm happy to see it accessible to a wider audience!

This is off-topic and I don't have time for further discussion at the moment:

On page 40 one of the authors is arguing that Cicero often disguises the Epicureans with phrases instead of naming them directly. The author states this is some kind of a rhetoric method.

"But at other times, both in these works and others where Epicurean doctrines, though not the focus, still come under some consideration, the interlocutor regularly invokes the Epicureans obliquely, using a periphrasis that identifies them as "those who refer all things to pleasure" or the like. □ Cicero uses a formulation of this sort at least twenty times in his theoretical works."

It strikes me, because this is something DeWitt suggests St. Paul is doing the same way in his epistles!