

# Episode 225 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 30 - Cicero Argues That Commitment To Virtue Is A Bar To Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of April 19, 2024 at 9:21 AM

**Welcome to Episode 225 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 move to section 35, the final section in Book Two of On Ends. We may finish the series today, or we may have a special section next week to review major takeaway points for both Books One and Two of On Ends - we will see how the time goes.

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](#).

XXXV. Read the eulogies, Torquatus, passed not upon the men who have been extolled by Homer, not upon Cyrus or Agesilaus or Aristides or Themistocles, not upon Philip or Alexander; read those of our own countrymen, of your own family; you will find that no one ever was extolled in such language as to be styled a subtle artist in the acquisition of pleasures. That is not the witness of the inscriptions on the tombs; this for example at the city gate: Many peoples agree that he was a leader of the nation beyond compare. Do we imagine that many peoples agreed concerning Calatinus that he was a leader of the nation, because he far excelled others in the production of pleasures? Are we then to say that those young men give good promise and shew great ability, whom we believe likely to be slaves to their own interests, and to do whatever brings them profit? Do we not see how great a confusion is likely to ensue in all affairs, and what great complications? Generosity is at an end; gratitude is at an end, and these are the bonds of peace. Nor, though you lend a thing to a man for your own sake, must it be called generosity, but usury, and no gratitude appears to be due to one who has made a loan for his own purposes. If pleasure is set on a throne, the highest virtues must necessarily take a low place. There are many forms of dishonour concerning which it is not easy to allege a reason why they should not beset the wise man, unless morality possesses by the laws of nature very

great power.

And, not to take in too many considerations (they are indeed countless) if virtue is adequately extolled, the approaches to pleasure are inevitably barred. Now do not expect any such eulogy from me; just examine your own mind yourself, and probing it with all possible deliberation question yourself whether you prefer to pass all your life in the thorough enjoyment of uninterrupted pleasures, in that calm of which you were continually talking, untouched by pain, with the proviso which your school are accustomed to add, though it is an impossible one, that fear of pain be absent, or rather, while rendering splendid service to the whole world, and bringing succor and deliverance to those in distress, to suffer even the dolours of Hercules? For in this way our ancestors designated his inevitable toils, using the most melancholy term dolours though he was a god. I should entice from you and even force from you a reply, did I not fear you would say that pleasure was the motive which induced even Hercules to achieve all that he did achieve by intense effort for the health of nations.

When I had thus spoken, Triarius [NOTE: Rackham says this is Torquatus] said, 'I have friends to whom I can refer these questions, and although I might have made some answer myself, still I would rather look to men better equipped than myself.' "I believe you mean our friends Siro and Philodemus, not only excellent men, but men of very great learning." "You understand me rightly," said he.

"Agreed, then," said I, "but it were fairer that Triarius should give some verdict about our disagreement."

"I reject him on affidavit," said Torquatus with a smile, "as prejudiced, at all events on this subject, since you handle these topics with some gentleness, while he persecutes us after the fashion of the Stoics."

Then Triarius remarked: "At least I shall do so hereafter with greater confidence. For I shall be ready with the doctrines I have just listened to; though I shall not attack you until I see that you have been primed by the friends you mention."

This said, we put an end at once to our walk and our debate.

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## Post by "Joshua" of April 19, 2024 at 10:55 PM

Since today (April 19th) is the anniversary of Lord Byron's death, I thought to include here several of his passages on pleasure and Epicureanism, which are mostly hostile;

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3812-episode-225-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-30-cicero-argues-that-commitment-to-v/>

Thou mak'st philosophers; there's Epicurus  
And Aristippus, a material crew!  
Who to immoral courses would allure us  
By theories quite practicable too;  
If only from the devil they would insure us,  
How pleasant were the maxim (not quite new),  
'Eat, drink, and love, what can the rest avail us?'  
So said the royal sage Sardanapalus.

\* \* \*

His classic studies made a little puzzle,  
Because of filthy loves of gods and goddesses,  
Who in the earlier ages raised a bustle,  
But never put on pantaloons or bodices;  
His reverend tutors had at times a tussle,  
And for their Aeneids, Iliads, and Odysseys,  
Were forced to make an odd sort of apology,  
For Donna Inez dreaded the Mythology.

Ovid's a rake, as half his verses show him,  
Anacreon's morals are a still worse sample,  
Catullus scarcely has a decent poem,  
I don't think Sappho's Ode a good example,  
Although Longinus tells us there is no hymn  
Where the sublime soars forth on wings more ample:  
But Virgil's songs are pure, except that horrid one  
Beginning with 'Formosum Pastor Corydon.'

Lucretius' irreligion is too strong,  
For early stomachs, to prove wholesome food;  
I can't help thinking Juvenal was wrong,  
Although no doubt his real intent was good,  
For speaking out so plainly in his song,  
So much indeed as to be downright rude;  
And then what proper person can be partial  
To all those nauseous epigrams of Martial?

\* \* \*

Man 's a phenomenon, one knows not what,  
And wonderful beyond all wondrous measure;

'Tis pity though, in this sublime world, that  
Pleasure's a sin, and sometimes sin's a pleasure;  
Few mortals know what end they would be at,  
But whether glory, power, or love, or treasure,  
The path is through perplexing ways, and when  
The goal is gain'd, we die, you know—and then—

What then?—I do not know, no more do you—  
And so good night.

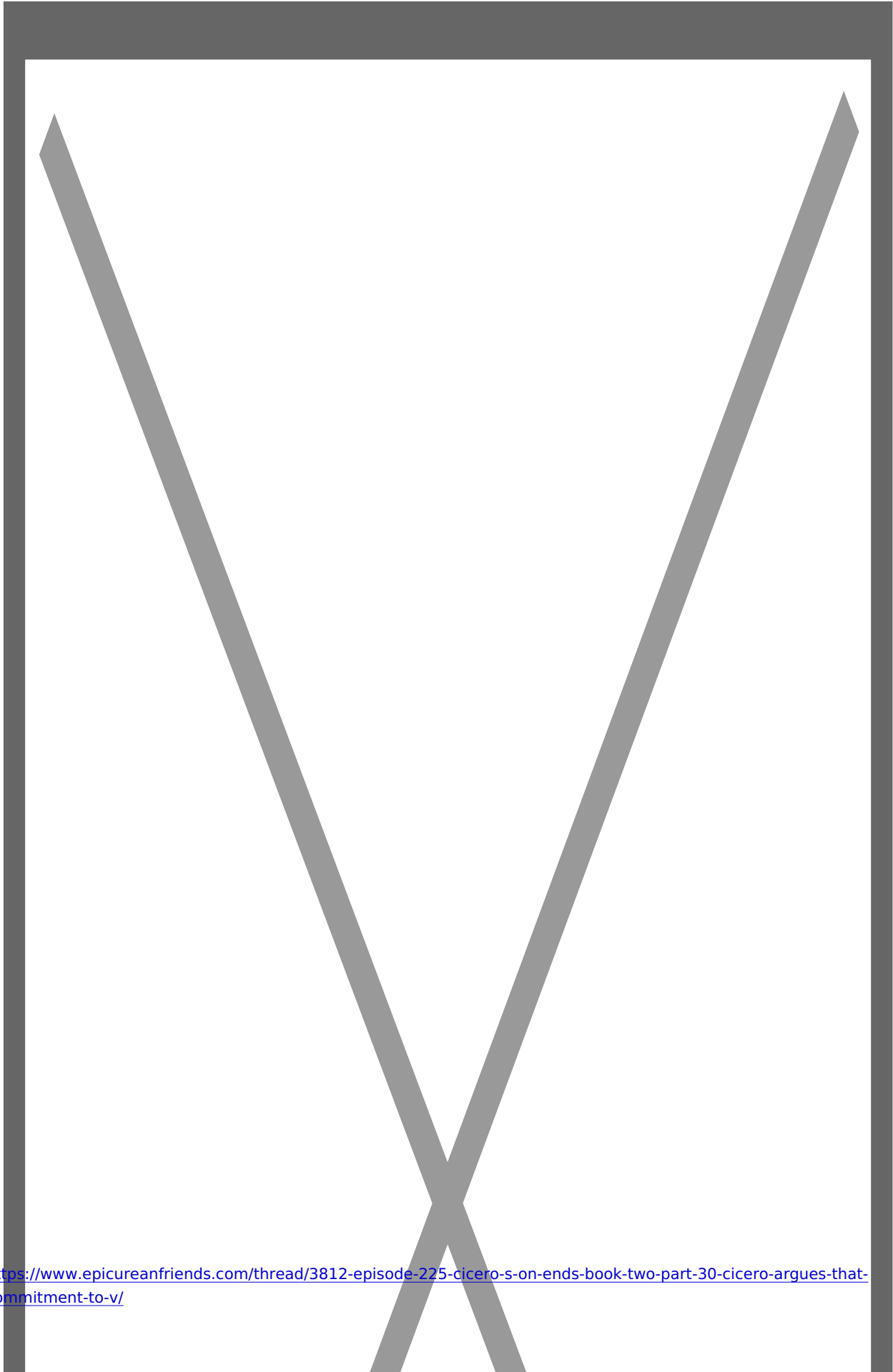
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## Post by “Cassius” of April 21, 2024 at 10:17 AM

Of relevance to this Episode:

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<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3812-episode-225-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-30-cicero-argues-that-commitment-to-v/>

[Hercules at the crossroads - Wikipedia](#)  
en.wikipedia.org

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**Post by “Joshua” of April 21, 2024 at 11:10 AM**



# The Guide of Life, Divine Pleasure

"Dux Vitae Diva Voluptas" – Lucretius Book Two, line 169



And for this cause we call **pleasure** the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize **pleasure** as the first good innate in us, and from **pleasure** we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to **pleasure** we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good. – Epicurus - Letter to Menoeceus

Not only Aristippus and his followers, but also Epicurus and his welcomed kinetic **pleasure**; I will mention what follows, to avoid speaking of the "storms" (of passion) and the "delicacies" which Epicurus often cites, and the "stimuli" which he mentions in his On the End-Goal. For he says "For I at least do not even know what I should conceive the good to be, if I eliminate the **pleasures** of taste, and eliminate the **pleasures** of sex, and eliminate the **pleasures** of listening, and eliminate the **pleasant** motions caused in our vision by a visible form. – Athenaeus – Deipnosophists XII p. 546E

The truth of the position that **pleasure** is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid **pleasures** alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the **pleasures** of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement. ... If then a life full of pain is the thing most to be avoided, it follows that to live in pain is the highest evil; and this position implies that a life of **pleasure** is the ultimate good. If then even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on **pleasure**, whereas **pleasure** is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that **pleasure** is the one supreme and final Good and that **a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure**. – Cicero's Epicurean Spokesman Torquatus - "On Ends"

For instance, in that book which embraces all your teaching (for I shall now play the part of translator, so no one may think I am inventing) you say this: "For my part I find no meaning which I can attach to what is termed good, if I take away from it the **pleasures** obtained by taste, if I take away the **pleasures** which come from listening to music, if I take away too the charm derived by the eyes from the sight of figures in movement, or other **pleasures** by any of the senses in the whole man. Nor indeed is it possible to make such a statement as this – that it is **joy of the mind** which is alone to be reckoned as a good; for I understand by a mind in a state of joy, that it is so, when it has the hope of all the **pleasures** I have named – that is to say the hope that nature will be free to enjoy them without any blending of pain." – Cicero - Tusculan Disputations, III. 18.41

But since, as I say, the issue is not 'what is the means of happiness?' but 'what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?', I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that **pleasure** is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunely messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end. – Diogenes of Oinoanda – the Inscription

He added that these same men were quite right in saying that the wise do everything for their own interests; that no sane man should engage in public affairs; that nothing was preferable to a life of tranquility crammed full of **pleasures**. – Cicero - In Defense of Publius Sestius 10.23

[Epicurus'] words are these: "That which produces a **jubilant** unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about (a jibe at the Peripatetics), prating meaninglessly about the good." – Plutarch - That Epicurus Actually Makes A Pleasant Life Impossible, 7, p. 1091A

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**Post by "Joshua" of April 21, 2024 at 11:28 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3812-episode-225-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-30-cicero-argues-that-commitment-to-v/>

In response to Cicero's question--'what happens to a society when everyone pursues pleasure as the goal'--I quoted the following from Christopher Hitchens;

Quote

You find me a state or a society that threw off theocracy, and threw off religion. And said: 'we adopt the teachings of Lucretius, and Democritus, and Galileo, and Spinoza, and Darwin, and Russell, and Jefferson, and Thomas Paine; and we make those what we teach our children. And we make that, scientific and rational humanism, our teaching.' And you find me that state that did that and fell into tyranny, and slavery, and famine, and torture, and then we'll be on a level playing field.

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**Post by "Cassius" of April 21, 2024 at 11:32 AM**

... and the confrontation between Zeno and Epicurus in "A Few Days In Athens," where Frances Wright weighs in on this question of "what would be the result of following Epicurus on pleasure?" is found in Chapter 7 here:

[Chapter Seven - A Few Days In Athens](#)

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**Post by "Pacatus" of April 21, 2024 at 3:22 PM**

"I lay open the mysteries of science; I expose the beauties of art; I call the graces and the muses to my aid; the song, the lyre, and the dance. ... I grant that I do not look to make men great, but to make men happy."

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The welcoming, freeing and encouraging therapy of the Garden, wherein perfect adherence to some set of self-binding rules is not requisite - versus the duty- and rule-binding severity of the Stoa, wherein even taking pleasure in one's accomplished virtue is suspect. (And its heir, the duty-based Kantian morality I I so deeply imbibed.)

The Stoa: "First be 'good'."

The Garden: "First be well."

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 23, 2024 at 6:52 PM

i am in the middle of editing this podcast and my attention is turned back to this:

We mention in the podcast that the very last argument that Cicero makes against Epicurus in Book 2 concerns how we should look to Hercules for the proper model of life rather than to Epicurus. We haven't talked much about "The Choice" between virtue and pleasure that Hercules was reputed to have made, but I think this deserves a lot more attention. The story was obviously of very great influence in the ancient world, but when we discussed it in the podcast none of us were very familiar with it and we had to rely on a quick read of Wikipedia. I think we can do a lot better than that, and I suspect that exploring the story would reveal why Lucretius chose to talk so much about Hercules in listing some of his exploits and comparing his accomplishments to those of Epicurus. Cicero speculates that if had given Torquatus time to answer that Torquatus would have argued that Hercules did what he did for pleasure, just as Torquatus answered that his own ancestors had fought wars for pleasure.

Given this story is apparently so central in ancient thought, I think we ought to explore it more. If anyone has anything to say before the podcast comes out, add it here, and we will probably in the end split of "The Choice of Hercules" or "Hercules at the Crossroads" into a separate thread of its own.

Is the choice that between "Virtue and Vice" or "Virtue and Pleasure?"

We will want to articulate the proper Epicurean response to this.



Post

**[RE: Episode 225 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 30 - Cicero Argues That Commitment To Virtue Is A Bar To Pleasure](#)**

Of relevance to this Episode:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hercules\\_at\\_the\\_crossroads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hercules_at_the_crossroads)



Cassius

April 21, 2024 at 10:17 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3812-episode-225-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-30-cicero-argues-that-commitment-to-v/>



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**Post by “Don” of April 23, 2024 at 7:30 PM**

Here's the beginning of the text from Xenophon:

[Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book 2, chapter 1, section 21](#)

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**Post by “Cassius” of April 23, 2024 at 7:54 PM**

Thank you Don! So is the Greek indeed "Vice" rather than Hedone / Pleasure?

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**Post by “Cassius” of April 23, 2024 at 7:55 PM**

So she's not offering just pleasure, but getting pleasure by apparently unjust means:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3812-episode-225-cicero-s-on-ends-book-two-part-30-cicero-argues-that-commitment-to-v/>

"Nay; you shall have the fruits of others' toil, and refrain from nothing that can bring you gain. For to my companions I give authority to pluck advantage where they will."

But interesting:

"Now when Heracles heard this, he asked, 'Lady, pray what is your name?'

"'My friends call me Happiness,' she said, 'but among those that hate me I am nicknamed Vice.'

And this does not strike me as simple "virtue" but more "common sense" or "the way things are" -

For of all things good and fair, the gods give nothing to man without toil and effort. If you want the favour of the gods, you must worship the gods: if you desire the love of friends, you must do good to your friends: if you covet honour from a city, you must aid that city: if you are fain to win the admiration of all [Hellas](#) for virtue, you must strive to do good to [Hellas](#): if you want land to yield you fruits in abundance, you must cultivate that land: if you are resolved to get wealth from flocks, you must care for those flocks: if you essay to grow great through war and want power to liberate your friends and subdue your foes, you must learn the arts of war from those who know them and must practise their right use: and if you want your body to be strong, you must accustom your body to be the servant of your mind, and train it with toil and sweat.'

And this is NOT the Epicurean approach to Pleasure:

[30] 'What good thing is thine, poor wretch, or what pleasant thing dost thou know, if thou wilt do nought to win them? Thou dost not even tarry for the desire of pleasant things, but fillest thyself with all things before thou desirest them, eating before thou art hungry, drinking before thou art thirsty, getting thee cooks, to give zest to eating, buying thee costly wines and running to and fro in search of snow in summer, to give zest to drinking; to soothe thy slumbers it is not enough for thee to buy soft coverlets, but thou must have frames for thy beds. For not toil, but the tedium of having nothing to do, makes thee long for sleep. Thou dost rouse lust by many a trick, when there is no need, using men as women: thus thou trainest thy friends, waxing wanton by night, consuming in sleep the best hours of day.'

So at least at this point I wouldn't see the ancient Epicureans seeing Hercules as an enemy, but someone else whose story has been distorted by religion and virtue.

Not sure about the rest.

So this is Socrates speaking to Aristippus himself?

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**Post by “Cassius” of April 24, 2024 at 4:57 PM**

Lucretius Today Podcast Episode 225 - "**Cicero Argues That Commitment To Virtue Is A Bar To Pleasure**" Is Now Available -

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/59639738>