

Episode 268 - Pleasure Is The Guide Of Life (The Role of Pleasure In Life)

Post by "Cassius" of February 10, 2025 at 7:05 AM

Welcome to Episode 268 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 we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

We are continuing our series of key doctrines of Epicurus, and this week and next week we are focusing on the nature of Pleasure and its role as the guide of life. These two discussions will be closely related, but first we follow up on last week's episode as to how it is Pleasure, rather than Virtue, that actually serves as the guide of life.

Next week we will dive deeper into the many aspects of Pleasure, but this week we will start with the role that Pleasure plays in the overall scheme of Nature - as a faculty, as a criterion of truth, and as the "guide of life" per Lucretius' line which is translated as:

1. Lucretius Book Two [167]:

1. *Munro*: "But some in opposition to this, ignorant of matter, believe that nature cannot without the providence of the gods, in such nice conformity to the ways of men, vary the seasons of the year and bring forth crops, aye and all the other things, which **divine pleasure, the guide of life**, prompts men to approach, escorting them in person and enticing them by her fondlings to continue their races through the arts of Venus, that mankind may not come to an end."
2. *Rouse*: "But some in opposition to this, knowing nothing of matter, believe that without the gods' power nature cannot with so exact conformity to the plans of mankind change the seasons of the year, and produce crops, and in a word all else which **divine pleasure, the guide of life**, persuades men to approach, herself leading them and coaxing them, through the ways of Venus, to beget their generations, that the human race may not come to an end."
3. *Humphries*: "Some people do not know how matter works. They think that nature needs the will of the gods to fit the seasons of the year so nicely to human needs, to bring to birth the crops And other blessings, which our guide to life, the radiance of pleasure, makes us crave through Venus' agency. "

Discussion Outline will be here:

[Pleasure Is The Guide of Life](#)

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/64492167/media>

Post by “Cassius” of February 10, 2025 at 11:36 AM

Further planning note:

While we will start by addressing briefly in this episode the sweeping nature of "pleasure" in Epicurean terms, we'll reserve the the main thrust of that argument until episode 269.

This episode will be devoted to the various proofs and arguments that Pleasure is the guide of life, which means we'll include the argument presented by Torquatus at Book One IX (lines 29 and thereafter) as to looking to the young of all species before they are corrupted.

As Torquatus references, however, some Epicureans argue that this proof can be made through reason:

([31] There are however some of our own school, who want to state these principles with greater refinement, and who say that it is not enough to leave the question of good or evil to the decision of sense, but that thought and reasoning also enable us to understand both that pleasure in itself is matter for desire and that pain is in itself matter for aversion. So they say that there lies in our minds a kind of natural and inbred conception leading us to feel that the one thing is fit for us to seek, the other to reject. Others again, with whom I agree, finding that many arguments are alleged by philosophers to prove that pleasure is not to be reckoned among things good nor pain among things evil, judge that we ought not to be too confident about our case, and think that we should lead proof and argue carefully and carry on the debate about pleasure and pain by using the most elaborate reasonings.)

So for this episode, please let us know if anyone has suggestions for what to include in this part of the discussion. Both Cosma Raimondi and Lorenzo Valla touch on this, and there are probably others we should include as well.

The discussion guide is now in better shape so this might be of help in thinking of additions:

[Pleasure Is The Guide of Life](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 13, 2025 at 8:10 AM

Just for fun...

Quote

"When the girl returned, some hours later, she carried a tray, with a cup of fragrant tea steaming on it; and a plate piled up with very hot buttered toast, cut thick, very brown on both sides, with the butter running through the holes in it in great golden drops, like honey from the honeycomb. The smell of that buttered toast simply talked to Toad, and with no uncertain voice; talked of warm kitchens, of breakfasts on bright frosty mornings, of cosy parlour firesides on winter evenings, when one's ramble was over and slippers feet were propped on the fender, of the purring of contented cats, and the twitter of sleepy canaries."

- Kenneth Grahame, The Wind in the Willows

Source: [Food Quotes](#)

Post by “Matteng” of February 14, 2025 at 10:57 AM

Attacks against this insight are mostly

1. Pleasure is fleeting

and

2. There is bad Pleasure.

What defenses would you see ?

The defense of the 1. is that yes everything is fleeting, so life is fleeting (even virtue) but there are the more stable forms of Pleasure like Ataraxia/ tranquility.

For the 2. there Epicurus divides Pleasure and their bad consequences.

How defensible is that?

Bad Pleasures could be addictions or laziness, sadism, masochism.

Post by “Godfrey” of February 14, 2025 at 5:13 PM

For 2., I would point out that Epicurus separates desires from pleasures. In doing so, he is able to clarify that there are various categories of desires which allow for personal evaluation, whereas all pleasures are good as a matter of biology.

The categories of desires are: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural. These are described in various PDs as well as in the Letter to Menoikeus.

Post by “Cassius” of February 21, 2025 at 5:55 AM

Episode 268 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today's episode is entitled: "[Pleasure Is The Guide of Life.](#)"

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/64492167/media>

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 21, 2025 at 8:09 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I would point out that Epicurus separates desires from pleasures. In doing so, he is able to clarify that there are various categories of desires which allow for personal evaluation, whereas all pleasures are good as a matter of biology.

The categories of desires are: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and unnatural. These are described in various PDs as well as in the Letter to Menoikeus.

I sometimes have trouble keeping track of desire distinctions vs. pleasure, but thinking further...

Desire is the motivation to act, with the outcome of the actions being either pleasure or pain.

Some desires lead to more pain, some lead to a mix of pain and pleasure, and some lead to all pleasure.

But we sometimes must endure some pain in the short-term, either to avoid a greater pain in the future or to experience a greater pleasure in the future (for the long-term health of the body and well-being of the soul) -- which is why there are the categories of desires.

Post by “Kalosyni” of February 21, 2025 at 8:15 AM

[Cassius](#) I think this Episode 268 - On Pleasure the Guide of Life - would be a great one for publishing the transcript...hoping that might be possible at some point?