

Episode 276 - TD06 - Is Memory Evidence For The Divinity Of The Soul?

Post by "Cassius" of April 11, 2025 at 7:02 AM

Welcome to Episode 276 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.

This week we continue our series covering Cicero's "Tusculan Disputations" from an Epicurean viewpoint. This series addresses five of the greatest questions in philosophy, with Cicero speaking for the majority and Epicurus the main opponent:

- 1. Is Death An Evil? (Cicero says no and Epicurus says no, but for very different reasons)**
- 2. Is Pain An Evil? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 3. Does the Wise Man Experience Grief and Fear? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 4. Does the Wise Man Experience Joy and Desire? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 5. Is Virtue Sufficient For A Happy Life? (Cicero says yes, Epicurus says no)**

As we found in Cicero's "On Ends" and "On The Nature of the Gods," Cicero treated Epicurean Philosophy as a major contender in the battle between the philosophies, and in discussing this conflict and explaining Epicurus' answers to these questions, we will deepen our understanding of Epicurus and how he compares to the other major schools.

This week we turn our attention further to "Is Death An Evil," and we will read beginning in [Section XXIV](#) where the discussion continues with more about the Pythagorean / Platonic view of the human soul.

We may be able to conclude the discussion of life after death this week, as most of the major arguments have already been given, and the remainder from 24 - 30 seems more like miscellaneous wrap-up.

Our general discussion guide for Tusculun Disputations is here:
<https://epicureanfriends.github.io/tusculundisput...lish/section:12>

And a side-by-side version with comments is here:

[EpicureanFriends SideBySide Commentary on TD](#)

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/65582250/media>

Post by “Joshua” of April 13, 2025 at 12:47 PM

While recording this episode we discussed Plato's view on learning and recollection, as described by Cicero here in section XXIV;

Quote

Besides, if desires and aversions were all that belonged to the soul, it would have them only in common with the beasts; but it has, in the first place, memory, and that, too, so infinite, as to recollect an absolute countless number of circumstances, which Plato will have to be a recollection of a former life; for in that book which is inscribed Menon, Socrates asks a child some questions in geometry, with reference to measuring a square; his answers are such as a child would make, and yet the questions are so easy, that while answering them, one by one, he comes to the same point as if he had learned geometry.

I made a connection between this passage and books about "Near-death experiences" - books like [Heaven is for Real](#), which tells the story of a young boy's appendectomy and his alleged experience of journeying to heaven after losing consciousness.

In the book, the father (Todd) of the boy (Colton) claims to be 'initially skeptical' about the experience, and he questions his son on what he saw. He claims that he refrained from asking leading questions.

Now, while kids are not omniscient, they are smarter than we give them credit for. In the late 19th and early 20th century there was a horse in Germany named [Clever Hans](#), and during public demonstrations this horse would give the appearance of performing arithmetic - literally counting with a hoofbeat. Wikipedia gives this summary;

Quote

Hans was a horse owned by Wilhelm von Osten, who was a gymnasium mathematics teacher, an amateur horse trainer and phrenologist and was considered to be a mystic.[1] Hans was said to have been taught to add, subtract, multiply, divide, work with fractions, tell the time, keep track of the calendar, differentiate between musical tones, and read, spell, and understand German. Von Osten would ask Hans, "If the eighth day of the month comes on a Tuesday, what is the date of the following Friday?" Hans would answer by tapping his hoof eleven times. Questions could be asked both orally and in written form. Von Osten exhibited Hans throughout Germany and never charged admission. Hans' abilities were reported in The New York Times in 1904.

The problem of how this horse could give the appearance of doing these things was answered in 1907, when

Quote

psychologist Oskar Pfungst demonstrated that the horse was not actually performing these mental tasks, but was watching the reactions of his trainer. The horse was responding directly to involuntary cues in the body language of the human trainer, who was entirely unaware that he was providing such cues.

On the one hand, we are asked to believe uncritically that a horse can understand fractions, and that a little boy went to heaven and came back, and that a child can explain geometry without having learned it - and from all this we should infer, for example, the eternity of the soul, the reality of Paradise after death, and the innate knowledge of everything at birth.

On the other hand, we can choose to approach these claims critically. Perhaps Todd Burpo, a Christian pastor himself, had filled his son's head with claims about heaven, and then heard those claims restated under questioning. Perhaps horses as well as humans are shrewd observers, and derived information from these observations that other baffled humans did not even know that they were themselves providing.

Perhaps the mind is a better and more sagacious judge when calm and sober, and that when undergoing traumatic experiences the mind is less reliable and not more so.

And perhaps that is why Lucian of Samosata in his [Alexander the Oracle-Monger](#) suggests that these apparent prodigies provide

Quote

an occasion for a Democritus, nay, for an Epicurus or a Metrodorus, perhaps, a man whose intelligence was steeled against such assaults by scepticism and insight, one who, if he could not detect the precise imposture, would at any rate have been

perfectly certain that, though this escaped him, the whole thing was a lie and an impossibility.

Post by “Cassius” of April 15, 2025 at 6:30 AM

Here's a cite to one reference I made in this episode as to the importance of our understanding the implications of death. It's from [Lucretius Book 3 around line 1060](#) - I generally think of it in Humphries words:

Quote

So each man flees
Himself, or tries to, but of course that pest
Clings to him all the more ungraciously.
He hates himself because he does not know
The reason for his sickness; if he did,
He would leave all this foolishness behind,
Devote his study to the way things are,
The problem being his lot, not for an hour,
But for all time, the state in which all men
Must dwell forever and ever after death.

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The Brown/Dunster version has it this way:

Quote

The restless fool does not know the cause of his disease; if he thoroughly did, every one would give up all other pursuits and apply chiefly to search into the nature of things; I do not mean to trouble himself about the events of the present hour, but inquire into the doubtful state of eternity after death, which is everyone's concern, and which must be the lot of all mankind.

Chatgpt handles it well:

Translate this for me from Latin:

quam bene si videat, iam rebus quisque relictis naturam primum studeat cognoscere rerum, temporis aeterni quoniam, non unius horae, ambigitur status, in quo sit mortalibus omnis aetas, post mortem quae restat cumque manendo.

ChatGPT said:

Certainly. The Latin passage you provided may be translated as follows:

Quote

"How much better it would be, if each person, seeing this clearly, would now abandon other pursuits and strive first to understand the nature of things, since it is the condition of eternal time — not just of a single hour — that is in question, the condition in which all mortal life must remain after death."

And comparing those, Munro as usual seems to be more literal:

Quote

For if he could rightly see into this, relinquishing all else, each man would study to learn the nature of things, since the point at stake is the condition for eternity, not for one hour, in which mortals have to pass all the time which remains for them to expect after death.

Post by “Cassius” of April 15, 2025 at 11:54 AM

Episode 276 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today's episode is entitled: "Is Memory Evidence Of The Divinity Of The Soul?"

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