

Episode 281 - TD12 - Is Pain The Greatest Evil - Or Even An Evil At All?

Post by "Cassius" of May 15, 2025 at 5:45 AM

Welcome to Episode 281 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 human life (Death, Pain, Grief/Fear, Joy/Desire, and Virtue) with Cicero speaking for the majority and Epicurus the main opponent:

Today we begin Part 2 - "Is Pain An Evil?," starting with [Section V](#), where the question is posed.

Our general discussion guide for Tusculan 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/66181988/media>

Post by "Cassius" of May 19, 2025 at 4:26 PM

I adjusted the title of the podcast to better address what we're about to cover. There are lots of implications in considering pain to be "the greatest evil" or even "an evil at all." In this first episode we don't dive headlong into what "evil" is supposed to be, mainly because I was absent and a slow-witted impersonator did not realize that we ought to start quickly with that question. However we'll come back to that in future episodes, and we'll want to consider how Epicurus is using the term "evil" in statements such as:

[PD10](#). If the things that produce the pleasures of profligates could dispel the fears of the mind about the phenomena of the sky, and death, and its pains, and also teach the limits of desires (and of pains), we should never have cause to blame them: for they would be filling themselves full, with pleasures from every source, and never have pain of body or mind, which is the **evil** of life.

[PD28](#). The same knowledge that makes one confident that nothing dreadful is eternal or long-lasting also recognizes, in the face of these limited **evils**, the security afforded by friendship.

[PD34](#). Injustice is not an **evil** in itself, but only in consequence of the fear which attaches to the apprehension of being unable to escape those appointed to punish such actions.

Menoceus:

[124] For the statements of the many about the gods are not conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the gift of the gods. For men being accustomed always to their own virtues welcome those like themselves, but regard all that is not of their nature as alien. Become accustomed to the belief that [death is nothing to us](#). For all **good and evil** consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation.

But the many at one moment shun death as the greatest of **evils**, at another (yearn for it) as a respite from the (evils) in life. (But the wise man neither seeks to escape life) nor fears the cessation of life, for neither does life offend him nor does the absence of life seem to be any **evil**. And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant.

[129] Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an **evil**, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided.

[130] Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as **bad**, and conversely the bad as good. - (Can we presume here "bad" = "evil" ?)

[134] For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation. As to chance, he does not regard it as a god as most men do (for in a god's acts there is no disorder), nor as an uncertain cause (of all things) for he does not believe that good and evil are given by chance to man for the framing of a blessed life, but that opportunities for great good and great evil are afforded by it.

Post by "Cassius" of May 19, 2025 at 4:43 PM

We'll take up this question (what does "evil" really mean to Epicurus and to us?) near the beginning of the next episode, so any comments or suggestions will be appreciated.

Post by "Don" of May 19, 2025 at 4:56 PM

FYI

[PD10](#)....the evil of life. ...ὁ περ ἐστὶ τὸ κακόν. NOTE: NO"of life" just "THAT (περ adds emphasis) is the evil. (I would suggest τὸ κακόν has the same connotation as ταγαθον (tagathon) "the highest good.")

[PD28](#) Evil doesn't seem to be in the original. Hicks: 28. The same conviction which inspires confidence that nothing we have to fear is eternal or even of long duration, also enables us to see that even in our limited conditions of life nothing enhances our security so much as friendship. (See @Eikadistes ' PD compilation too)

[PD34](#) Ἡ ἀδικία οὐ καθ' ἑαυτὴν κακόν,

In Menoikeus, the word translated evil is overwhelmingly κακός (kakos). Except for 125: οὐθὲν γάρ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ζῆν δεινὸν τῷ κατειληφότι γνησίως τὸ μηθὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν.

For there is nothing *terrible* in living for the one who truly comprehends that there is nothing *terrible* in not living."

The same word as the 4th line of the Tetraphatmakos.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, κα^κός](#)

Wiktionary has 93 head words listed for this word from Woodhouse, S. C. (1910) English-Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language

[κακός - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

Post by “Cassius” of May 19, 2025 at 5:27 PM

Early in our discussion of the text in this episode, Cicero brings up the very interesting case of Hieronymus the Rhodian. Cicero overall seems to live Hieronymus more than Epicurus, because Hieronymus holds "absence of pain" to be the chief good, and not "pleasure" as does Epicurus.

The example of how dramatically differently Hieronymus and Epicurus viewed "absence of pain" and "pleasure," and how Cicero recognized that they were viewed differently in ancient philosophy - is in my view one of the most compelling pieces of evidence that we today need to be very careful not to assume that we know what "absence of pain" meant to Epicurus. Hieronymus clearly understood "absence of pain" to be something different than pleasure, and in fact Hieronymus denounced pleasure. Epicurus takes the opposite approach, praising pleasure, and considering pleasure, not "absence of pain" as the correct term for the goal of life.

Past discussion of this is here:

Thread

[Are You Epicurean Or Hieronymian?](#)

According to Doctrine 3, Epicurus held that the limit of quantity of pleasure is the absence of pain. This is a function of the truism / premise that there are only two feelings - pleasure and pain - which means that in quantity, the measurement that describes the "absence" of the one is the same measurement as the "presence" of the other. But this observation is limited to quantity - it has nothing to do with the quality or the detail of the type of pleasure (or pain) that is being...



Cassius

October 1, 2019 at 2:08 PM

Post by “Eikadistes” of May 19, 2025 at 6:17 PM

I particularly like the etymology of κακόν because it has been thematically consistent for so many millennia: as a kid, whether it was friends in the Northeast, or South, or Appalachia, in the city, or the country, from any side of the tracks, everyone told their toddlers that gross things are "kaka".

It's silly, but also, it reinforces that *this* notion is foundational to how we understand the world. It seems almost like a pure preconception: bad is painful is unhealthy. 😊😐🤢

Post by “Cassius” of May 21, 2025 at 6:30 AM

Episode 281 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today we begin Part Two of Cicero's Tusculan Disputations with an episode entitled: "Is Pain The Greatest Evil - Or An Evil At All?"

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/66181988/media>