

Sunday June 2nd, Zoom Discussion: "Is Pain Properly Considered To Be An Evil?"

Post by "Cassius" of May 29, 2025 at 3:57 PM

For Sunday Zoom on June 2nd, our special discussion topic will be "Is Pain Properly Considered To Be An Evil?" This question will track our current discussion taken from Tusculan Disputations in the Lucretius Today Podcast, where we started this discussion last week in [Episode 281](#) and continued it in our just-released [Episode 282](#). Given where we are in the podcast sequence, if anyone has questions or comments they wish to post before the Sunday session, please post them in the thread for [Episode 282](#). There are a number of citations in the Epicurean texts which address this issue, so feel free to add them to that thread so we can refer to them Sunday.

Post by "Kalosyni" of June 1, 2025 at 1:41 PM

It was good to see everyone today at the Zoom. 😊

A further thought:

We don't act "morally" because of virtue, but we act "morally" because of pleasure and pain (and the fear of long- term unpleasant consequences). And acting wisely is a pleasure.

Post by "Titus" of June 1, 2025 at 11:58 PM

Some thoughts on today's/yesterday's talk:

1. Good and evil have all but vanished from my vocabulary. I don't know whether it's something related to simply getting older or a societal shift or indeed related to the study of Epicureanism.

For the following lines I apologize in advance, if I haven't grasped the discussion correctly.

2. There is a Epicurean "response" to Cicero's claim that a bad reputation may be worse than feeling pain. Unfortunately, I don't remember where it is from. In English it's something like:

"Recognition of the environment must come naturally. We are drawn to strive for our own healing alone."

3. Does Cicero think so, because from a theoretical Stoic point of view he is able to ignore bodily pain but his public standing is beyond his means? In contrast, I would state that bodily pain is by far more present than being afraid of social infamy. The Epicurean response might be focusing on the essentials of life first, as they are related to ourselves innately. Infamy can be treated by refocussing on one's circle of friends, ignoring the public standing (as long as it isn't threatening existentially).

Surely, in the end it depends on what is the biggest hardship to oneself.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 2, 2025 at 8:05 AM

[Quote from Titus](#)

Does Cicero think so, because from a theoretical Stoic point of view he is able to ignore bodily pain but his public standing is beyond his means?

Cicero is a bit of a mix, and even a few parts of the Torquatus section have Stoic elements (for example, the father could have banished his son, rather than killing him).

[Quote from Titus](#)

"Recognition of the environment must come naturally. We are drawn to strive for our own healing alone."

Vatican Saying 64: "The esteem of others is outside our control; we must attend instead to healing ourselves."

[Quote from Titus](#)

1. Good and evil have all but vanished from my vocabulary. I don't know whether it's something related to simply getting older or a societal shift or indeed related to the study of Epicureanism.

As for myself, I still use the word "good" but virtually never use the word "evil". "Evil" has attached to it a flavor of the Christian religion.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 2, 2025 at 8:12 AM

Creating a new thread to move over the topic here

Post by “Titus” of June 2, 2025 at 11:36 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Vatican Saying 64: "The esteem of others is outside our control; we must attend instead to healing ourselves."

It seems to be this one. How different translations can sound!

Post by “Cassius” of June 2, 2025 at 11:59 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Cicero is a bit of a mix, and even a few parts of the Torquatus section have Stoic elements (for example, the father could have banished his son, rather than killing him).

Just to make a record on this one in case someone wants to discuss this further, I very much disagree that this example is contrary to Epicurean philosophy. It's consistent with Epicurus for the very reason that Torquatus explains, and which is the reason that he cites it, in that all questions in life have to be put to the test of what will happen if one takes them as opposed to not taking them. In every question you add up the expected consequences and it's up to you to choose among the resulting mixes of pleasures and pains that will result.

In this case we can see the choice of the elder Torquatus to execute his son for violating the rules of engagement as a variation of the "Trolley problem." it would have been completely legitimate for the elder Torquatus to judge that if he spared his son, the resulting erosion of

military discipline would have doomed all of Rome to the defeat of its army and the destruction of many thousands or more of the Roman citizenry.

Torquatus does not allege that his ancestor took special pleasure in the loss of his son - the implication is the opposite - that he judged that the "pleasure" or happiness, in the full sense of those words - would be greater in total even given the loss of his son.

Cicero's argument in not explaining this more fully is very similar to his ridicule of Epicurus for saying that one can find it "sweet" to be roasted in the bull of Phalaris. Even here where Torquatus is allowed to speak about his ancestors, Cicero is omitting the full extent of the explanation and thereby making it look ridiculous and contradictor, when in fact it is not.

The Epicurean point is the wider one, and there's no reason to back away from the elder Torquatus' decision, much less to call it "Stoic." A Stoic might well have decided to spare his son on the ground that the virtue of loyalty to family is unbreachable. Or a Stoic might have looked to "providence" or "fate" and kick the decision to them.

What Epicurus is telling us to do is to be logical and consistent in our identification of the goal of life, and to evaluate ALL the consequences before we make our decision.