

Episode 285 - TD15 - The Significance Of The Limits Of Pain

Post by "Cassius" of June 7, 2025 at 3:12 PM

Welcome to Episode 285 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.

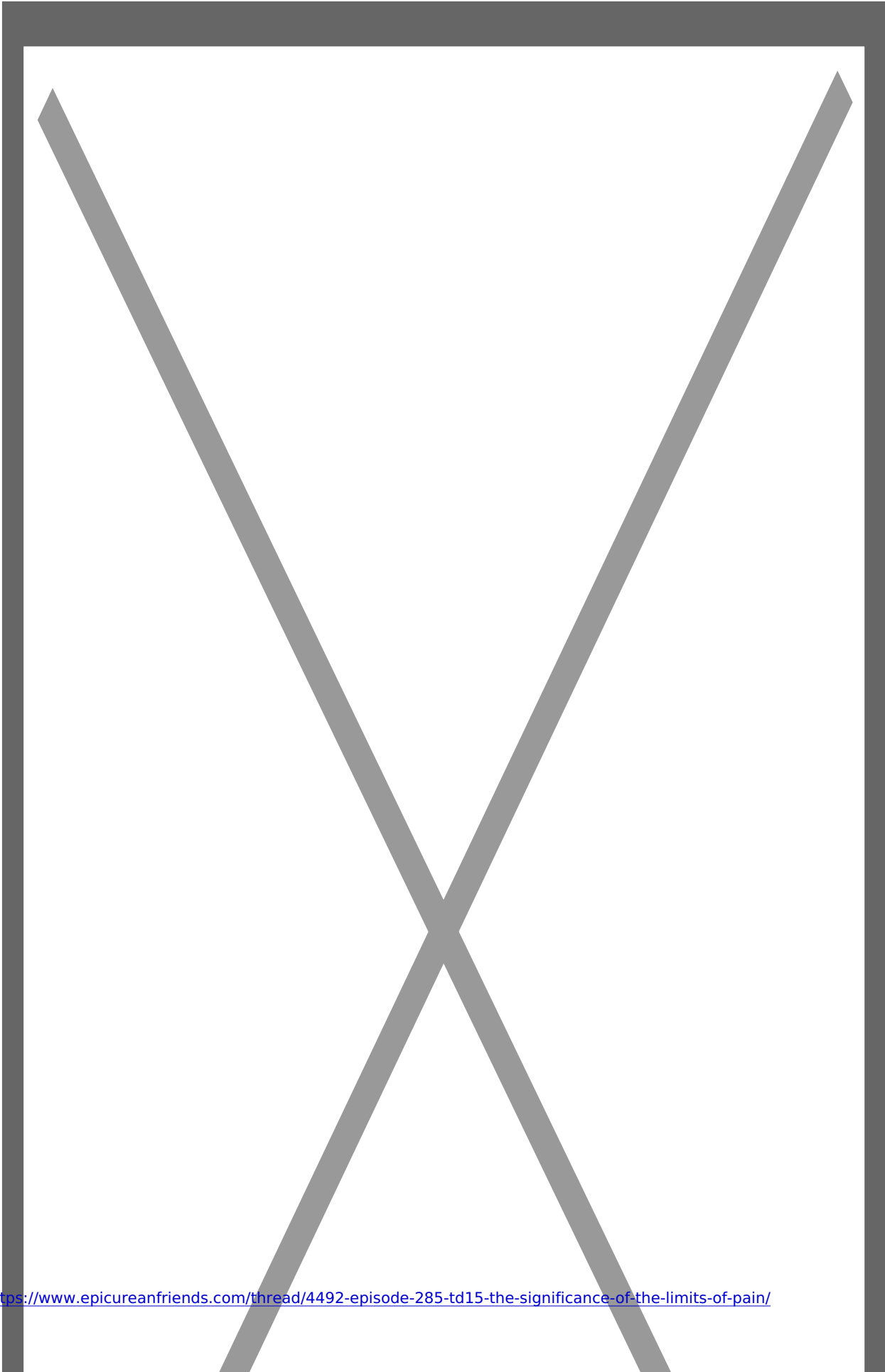
Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

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 continue in Part 2 - "Is Pain An Evil?." Last week we focused on Cicero's observations that we can prepare ourselves for bodily pain through exercise and training, a point in which Cicero did not pick out Epicurus as an opponent, and on which the ancient Epicureans would likely have agreed, at least to an extent. This week, Cicero tells us that he is going to leave to the Stoics to argue that pain is not evil, and he himself is going to proceed to talk about his opinion on how to deal with bodily pain, whether you are a soldier or a philosopher. We'll be picking up today with [Section XVIII](#), and we'll see that Cicero focuses his attack on Epicurus' Principal Doctrine 4, and that will give us a great opportunity to explore that doctrine more closely.

Just as he was mentioned last week as an example of someone suffering great pain, *Philoctetes* is again mentioned by name as a point of reference, so we'll want to acquaint ourselves with his story:

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[Philoctetes - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

I don't see anything there that indicates that Philoctetes cried out over his pain in an embarrassing way, but thus Cicero seems to say at [XXIII](#):

But this should be principally regarded in pain, that we must not do anything timidly, or dastardly, or basely, or slavishly, or effeminately, and above all things we must dismiss and avoid that Philoctetean sort of outcry.

As might be expected, Cicero spends a lot of time talking about facing down pain in wartime, but at [XXV](#) he turns to the topic of dealing with pain in peacetime.

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/66550494/media>

Post by “Cassius” of June 13, 2025 at 12:32 PM

Episode 285 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. Today we continue Part Two of Cicero's treatment of the nature of evil in Tusculan Disputations, and our episode is entitled: "The Significance Of The Limits Of Pain"

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/66550494/media>

Post by “Cassius” of June 13, 2025 at 2:22 PM

The [citation from Lucretius mentioned in this episode](#):

1-102

But still I fear your caution will dispute the maxims I lay down, who all your life have trembled at the poets' frightful tales. Alas! I could even now invent such dreams as would pervert the steadiest rules of reason, and make your fortunes tremble to the bottom. No wonder! But if Men were once convinced that death was the sure end of all their pains, they might with reason,

then, resist the force of all Religion, and contemn the threats of poets. Now, we have no sense, no power, to strive against prejudice, because we fear a scene of endless torments after death.

Post by “Patrikios” of June 18, 2025 at 5:09 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As might be expected, Cicero spends a lot of time talking about facing down pain in wartime, but at XXV he turns to the topic of dealing with pain in peacetime.

As I’ve been following these discussions on pain, I too find PD-04 difficult to fully comprehend; especially as it relates to the natural pains (in mind & body) .

During the podcast, [Joshua](#) made these excellent comments.

*“Nothing could be added to the pain that he’s experiencing right now. That is the definition of superlative. But, because the mind acts as a kind of force multiplier for pleasure, **if you use it correctly**, he says, I set over and above it all the pleasure of the memory of our past friendship .”*

I recalled a paper that gave some insight into how to ‘**use the mind correctly**’. In his paper, “**Epicurean Stability (eustatheia): A Philosophical Approach of Stress Management**”, Dr. Yapijakis states:

- With **recollection**, impressions of past pleasures stay in the mind and can be evoked easily. Being able to easily ignore pain and to evoke and hold pleasant recollections is **an art that can be learned**.
- **Oblivion** is the blessed ability to forget unpleasant situations and people. A philosopher must **learn the art of dismissal**, along with the art of recollection. The value of forgetfulness is one of the most important principles in the science of happiness.

[C. Yapijakis & G. P. Chrousos . Conatus 7, no. 2 (2022): 173-190 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.31769>]

These comments seem to imply that Epicurus and his schools might have taught the “arts” of pain management (recollection, oblivion), as part of learning how to implement [PD04](#). This viewpoint from Yapijakis (& others?) may have been discussed on this forum before, but re-reading Yapijakis in the context of [PD04](#) does help my understanding of the value in learning &

practicing such **eustatheia** skills.

This VS-47 might also apply to why we should learn to withstand pains.

VS47. *I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and **entrenched myself against all thy secret attacks**. And I will not give myself up as captive to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for me to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, I will leave life crying aloud a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.*

Do others see this viewpoint that Epicurus was teaching pain management techniques, in order for his disciples to become 'wise' in using the mind, and live a "blessed life"?

Post by "Don" of June 19, 2025 at 7:05 AM

Warning: mention of suicide in this post.

[Cassius](#) brings up VS47, attributed to Metrodorus, and the "exiting the stage" as an out for those in severe pain. While Atticus may have stopped eating and other Epicureans took measures to not prolong life, I didn't see this as an endorsement of suicide.

We've discussed VS47 in the post, including:

Post

[RE: If Death Is Nothing To Us, Then Life Is Everything to Us](#)

Good catch, Joshua...

[...]

I'd offer the following: The key phrase in that translation isn't the spitting on life, it's the "when it is time for us to go." I don't think VS47 has anything to do with having the option to "exit the stage" if we're in pain as above where Cassius implies (and states that outright).

VS47 is attributed to Metrodorus:

<https://archive.org/details/metrod...ge/561/mode/1up>

And the Epicurus Wiki does a really nice job parsing the Greek:

...



Don

October 7, 2023 at 7:37 AM

I continue to see VS47 as urging people to not take extraordinary measures to prolong suffering and pain when death is inevitable, as it will eventually be for everyone. Atticus decision to not eat was a decision to not fight against his incurable condition. His Wikipedia article actually does a decent job in going that way (emphasis added):

Just after his 77th birthday he fell ill, and at first his ailment appeared minor. But after three months his health suddenly deteriorated. Deciding to accelerate the inevitable, he abstained from ingesting any nourishment, starving himself to death, and dying on the fifth day of such fasting, "which was the 31st March, in the consulship of Cn. Domitius and C. Sosius", that is in the year 32 BC.

Maybe I'm splitting hairs, but I see a difference in not fighting one's inevitable mortality when death is assured and saying exiting the stage when the hope of pleasure isn't possible as two very different perspectives. I fully endorse the former and hope, when my time comes (LOL at least three decades+ from now!) that I can go with a song on my lips or in my mind.