

Episode 289 - TD19 - "Epicureans Are Not Spocks!"

Post by "Cassius" of July 4, 2025 at 3:03 PM

Welcome to Episode 289 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.

Today we continue in Part 3, which addresses anger, pity, envy, and other strong emotions. We'll continue reading today with [Section IX](#).

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/66929068/media>

Post by "Cassius" of July 4, 2025 at 3:11 PM

Our material this week will start with Cicero discussing anger, and apparently taking the position that the wise man will never be angry.

We'll need to contrast that with what Philodemus has to say as discussed in this thread:

Post

[RE: Philodemus' "On Anger" - General - Texts and Resources](#)

Couple more quotes from the Philodemus text:

From page 41 of the Armstrong book:

37.24-39: "the emotion itself, taken in isolation, is an evil, since it is painful or is analogous to

something painful, but if taken in conjunction with one's disposition, we think that it is something that may even be called a good. For it (anger) results from seeing what the nature of states of affairs is and from not having any false beliefs in our comparative calculations of our losses and in our...



Cassius

April 1, 2022 at 6:00 PM

Post by "Cassius" of July 4, 2025 at 3:16 PM

Voula Tsouna, in her "Ethics of Philodemus," says:

Quote

.... Section V deals with the issue of whether anger is a good or a bad thing. It elaborates Philodemus' distinction between two kinds of anger, which he calls, respectively, ὀργή (translit. orgē) and θυμός (translit. thymos), as well as his contention that the Epicurean sage experiences the former kind of anger (orgē) but not the latter.

...

Quote

Epicurus makes the puzzling remark that the wise man is more susceptible than other men to some passions without this impeding his wisdom (D.L. X. 117), and he asserts that the gods feel neither anger nor gratitude (KD 1)—which might imply that lesser beings feel both. According to Philodemus, Epicurus also claims that the wise man will experience thymos; similar statements are found in the writings of Metrodorus and Hermarchus as well (De ir. XLV. 5-15). In general, 'the Great Men' appear to have held that some sort of anger is unavoidable, and that some sages are more prone to it than others. However, they evidently did not clarify just what kind of anger is ineradicable or whether the wise man is susceptible to every form of anger. Later Epicureans debate these issues, each group giving a different interpretation of the canonical texts and citing scripture to defend it. The position that Philodemus advocates in *On Anger* (probably also held by Zeno of Sidon and his school) is one such view: the sage never experiences an unnatural kind of anger, but is liable to feeling a natural kind of anger compatible with moral perfection. Thus, Philodemus can be perceived as striking a wise

compromise between the Peripatetics and the Stoics, and also as holding a middle ground between competing Epicurean factions.²²

...

Quote

Since there is false reasoning of some sort induced by the word (sc. $\text{org}\bar{\epsilon}$), we do not make any simple pronouncement (sc. as to whether anger is a fine or an evil thing), but we claim that the emotion itself taken in isolation is an evil because it is painful or close to painful, whereas taken in conjunction with one's disposition it can even be called a good, as we think. For it results from our understanding of the nature of things and from our holding no false beliefs in the matter of measuring the offences and of punishing the offenders. As a result, in the same way in which we called empty anger (cf. $\kappa[\epsilon\nu\eta\nu \acute{\omicron}\rho]\gamma\eta\nu$: XXXVIII. 1) an evil because it arises from a thoroughly corrupt disposition and brings on countless troubles, we must call natural anger (cf. $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\kappa\acute{\eta}[\nu]$: XXXVIII. 6) not an evil—but, in so far as it is something biting,⁸⁰ [it lasts a very short time].

(XXXVII. 20–XXXVIII. 9)

Quote

[To call anger] a weakness ($\tau\acute{o} \acute{\alpha}\sigma\theta\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\zeta$) and then apply it to the wise man, so that we also make him weak, is no great problem to us, as it is to some thinkers. They, writing against the $\text{K}\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\alpha\iota \text{D}\acute{o}\xi\alpha\iota$, maintained that it was extraordinary that anyone had dared to claim that anger, gratitude and all these sorts of things occur in weakness, since Alexander, the most powerful human being of all, was subject to frequent outbursts of anger and did favours to countless men. However, it is not the weakness opposite to the strong constitution of athletes and kings that the (Epicurean) argument is talking about. It is rather a natural constitution subject to death and pain, of which Alexander and indeed every other human being have their share, and perhaps most of all those who, like him, are called the most powerful in that other sense of the word.

(XLIII. 14–41)⁹⁵

Quote

We shall tell our opponent that the sage will be profoundly alienated from, and indeed hates, the person who inflicts on him such great [injuries] or will obviously cause him [great] damage in the future—for this is a fitting consequence (ἀκ[όλο]υθον: XLII. 3-4)—but he does not suffer great mental disturbance. [Neither is any] external thing [all that important], since the sage is not even susceptible to great mental disturbance in the presence of great physical pain, let alone in the presence of angry feelings. For [to be in a state of dreadful suffering] derives from folly. So if one is a fool, this suffering can be [inevitable]. Indeed, there are infinite misfortunes both involved in his folly and consequent upon it, into which the wise man, having a completely clear vision of them (θεωρῶν: XLII. 19-20), would never fall.
(XLI. 39-XLII. 20)

Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2025 at 7:14 AM

In this episode and probably the next, it will be good to remember these two Vatican Sayings, as they are directly relevant to Cicero's discussion of preparing for hardship and dealing with it.

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.

VS55. We must heal our misfortunes by the grateful recollection of what has been, and by the recognition that it is impossible to undo that which has been done

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 6, 2025 at 3:34 PM

The following is from [post 10 in the thread on Philodemus](#) (referenced above), and a good summary:

Quote

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The conclusion of all this seems to be about as is stated on page 301 of the text (Column 46 of the roll):

So, then, having laid down these things on our own behalf and concerning us, with arguments that prove it, in support of there being a natural kind of anger, we have [indeed] replied *that the sage will become angry*.

(my emphasis on the last six words)

The main distinction seems to be that the wise person will in fact become angry when the situation calls for it, and will in fact act on his anger, but only after evaluating the situation coolly so as to determine if he does have the capacity to act in a way that will deter future conduct of the same sort. The other significant premise seems to be that the wise man will not let his anger turn into "rage," with the point apparently being that the wise man will feel his emotions deeply, but will not let those deeply-felt emotions interfere with his clear thinking.

All this may appear simple and straightforward enough, but it flies in the face of the Stoic or the "emotion-suppression" model that a lot of people seem to attribute to Epicurus. And it also flies in the face of the view that the Epicurean will above all avoid disturbance.

Post by "Cassius" of July 10, 2025 at 12:03 PM

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