

Episode 301 - TD29 - Epicurus And The Question Of Ends Justifying Means

Post by “Cassius” of September 27, 2025 at 7:48 PM

Welcome to Episode 301 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 be moving forward in Cicero's "Tusculan Disputations," as we of course cover it from an Epicurean perspective, and we will complete [Section XX](#) where we finally get to the Gracchus brothers and see how Cicero uses them to illustrate how people can speak much the same words but mean very different things.

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/68004725/media>

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In the text for this episode, Cicero uses the story of the Gracchi and their reforms to illustrate how dramatically words and goals can differ. It will be worth knowing a little about that background, so here's a pretty good video setting the stage.

<https://youtu.be/pFyqcR-4yFw>

Cicero specifically mentions the Sempronian law:

[Lex Sempronia - Wikipedia](#)

Also:

[Gracchan opposition](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4740-episode-301-td29-epicurus-and-the-question-of-ends-justifying-means/>

Since Piso was in Sicily during his entire consulship, ancient sources do not tell his attitude towards [Tiberius Gracchus](#), who as plebeian tribune moved an ambitious set of reforms to redistribute Roman public lands. It is generally assumed that Piso was among his opponents, because he was later an outspoken enemy of [Gaius Gracchus](#) (Tiberius' younger brother), but several politicians initially supported Tiberius and later opposed his reforms or his attempt to be reelected as tribune, starting with Scaevola, Piso's consular colleague.^[31] D C Earl suggests that Piso initially regarded Tiberius' program with a "benevolent neutrality" as he had connections with the Fulvii Flacci and the patrician Claudii, who were Gracchan allies.^[32]

The main anecdote for Piso's opposition is an anecdote placed in his mouth by Cicero. According to Cicero, after Gaius Gracchus passed a law establishing a subsidised grain supply over Piso's opposition, Piso appeared in the queue and when Gaius enquired as to his hypocrisy, he responded "I'm not keen, Gracchus... on you getting the idea of sharing out my property man by man, but if that's what you're going to do, I'll take my cut".^{[33][34][35]}

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2025 at 5:12 PM

Episode 301 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week our episode is entitled: "Epicurus And The Question Of Ends Justifying Means"

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Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2025 at 5:19 PM

As I get this episode finalized I realize that as usual I didn't think fast enough to make a couple of points that need to go along with this topic.

First, as Joshua noted we didn't address Cicero's criticism of associating evil with pain, so we'll address that next week. (Maybe we can spend another week on section 20!)

Second, Joshua mentioned the great difficulty of judging the sincerity and motivation of people who claim to have the same goal but are advocating for very different courses of action. Had I been thinking quickly I would have gone further into that topic, because very frequently both sides of an issue do in fact have what we would consider to be high-minded motivations. There's often no real basis for considering "good faith" to be the test that will allow us to choose between two very different courses of action. As the old saying goes, "the road to hell is

paved with good intentions."

What we need to expand on is that in addition to looking at "intention" and "good faith," what Epicurus teaches us to do is to be insightful in calculating the actual results of two courses of action. And that's a question of wisdom and prudence that goes far beyond whether someone has "good intentions" in advocating for a point of view.

So we'll come back to that point next week too!

Post by “Matteng” of October 14, 2025 at 2:22 PM

And sometimes I think there are often false dichotomies or strawmen accused against hedonism or Epicureanism like Virtue vs Pleasure.

For this subject for example it is not only means vs Ends but we can judge/value (with our feelings) the means and the ends.

For example the horrific idea of murdering 1 healthy person and spending his/her organs to save the lives of 5 other persons.

To allow this we would lose security and the right for life (which is a social institution based on social contract) and no one would want to be the spender.

Or another example is when Kant was asked if to lie could be ok when saving lives. He denied it and gave (ironically) the reason that would lead society in confusion and destroy trust between people. What he not recognized is that his reasoning is based on the utility (trust, no confusing).

You have only to ask many times "Why" an Deontologists/Kantian and you get to their core reasonings which they have to admit => you value everything with Pleasure/Pain/Feeling/Utility

