

Episode 303 - TD31 - Is It Truly Impossible To Advocate For Epicurus In The Public Sphere?

Post by “Cassius” of October 9, 2025 at 11:28 AM

Welcome to Episode 303 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 covering Cicero's "Tusculan Disputations" from an Epicurean perspective and we move into [Section XXI](#) to address a particularly important challenge from Cicero:

How do we advocate the Epicurean position in public gatherings?

Quote

But these men behave with too much heat, especially as the opinions which they would uphold are no very spirited ones, and such as they dare not plead for either in the senate, or before the assembly of the people, or before the army, or the censors: but, however, I will argue with them another time, and with such a disposition that no quarrel shall arise between us; for I shall be ready to yield to their opinions when founded on truth. Only I must give them this advice: That were it ever so true, that a wise man regards nothing but the body; or, to express myself with more decency, never does anything except what is expedient, and views all things with exclusive reference to his own advantage; as such things are not very commendable, they should confine them to their own breasts, and leave off talking with that parade of them.

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/68179312/media>

Post by “Cassius” of October 12, 2025 at 4:23 PM

We just recorded this podcast several hours ago so the final product won't be out until later in the week, but the exercise prompted me to generate this post which we can discuss in a

separate thread:

Thread

[Shall We Put Together An Essay Contest With A Prize Of An Annual "Torquatus Award For Excellence In Epicurean Advocacy"?](#)

I realized something in recording the Lucretius Today podcast today. Our topic was Cicero's challenge that it is impossible to advocate for the Epicurean in public - that in Cicero's words we "*dare not plead for either in the senate, or before the assembly of the people, or before the army, or the censors.*" (*Tusculan Disputations 3:21*)

As far as I am aware there are essentially TWO examples of Epicurean advocacy in existence which - with only slight modification, if any - would be suitable for...



Cassius

October 12, 2025 at 4:22 PM

Post by "Cassius" of October 14, 2025 at 4:52 PM

I just posted an excerpt from something Joshua said in Episode 302 [about pleasure ethics from Thomas Moore's Utopia](#), and another quote comes to mind which is on a related topic and which responds to Cicero's allegation that an Epicurean should not boast about doing everything for his own benefit. (*That were it ever so true, that a wise man regards nothing but the body; or, to express myself with more decency, never does anything except what is expedient, and views all things with exclusive reference to his own advantage; as such things are not very commendable, they should confine them to their own breasts, and leave off talking with that parade of them.*)

A part of what I would include in responding to that would be to point out how much emphasis Epicurus places on friendship, and placing the interest of our friends as important to us as our own. As Torquatus said about his ancestor, we are strongly motivated to do unpleasant things for the safety and benefit of our friends country as that is our own strongest assurance of safety. I would suggest that this kind of wider concern equates at least roughly with one's friends, at least for someone in public office in the sense of *Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears...*

The quote that comes to mind to support the view that this kind of concern for our friends is natural, and would be fully sufficient for someone to proclaim to the public, even on taking an

office as to the principle on which he would act while in office, is the following from Nietzsche which [I've cited before](#), from The Gay Science. Nietzsche doesn't seem entirely happy about it, but he's making a point I think most of us can very much appreciate:

Quote

How is it possible to keep to one's own way? Constantly, some clamor or other calls us aside; rarely does our eye behold anything that does not require us to drop our own preoccupation instantly to help. I know, there are a hundred decent and praiseworthy ways of losing my own way, and they are truly highly "moral"! Indeed, those who now preach the morality of pity even take the view that precisely this and only this is moral—to lose one's own way in order to come to the assistance of a neighbor. I know just as certainly that I only need to expose myself to the sight of some genuine distress and I am lost. And if a suffering friend said to me, "Look, I am about to die; please promise to die with me," I should promise it; and the sight of a small mountain tribe fighting for its liberty would persuade me to offer it my hand and my life . . . All such arousing of pity and calling for help is secretly seductive, for our "own way" is too hard and demanding and too remote from the love and gratitude of others, and we do not really mind escaping from it . . . while I shall keep silent [verschweigen, i.e., hide, conceal, keep secret] about some points, I do not want to remain silent about my morality which says to me: Live in seclusion [Lebe im Verborgenen, i.e, live secretly, discreetly, in hiding or concealment] so that you can live for yourself. Live in ignorance about what seems most important to your age. Between yourself and today lay the skin of at least three centuries. And the clamor of today, the noise of wars and revolutions should be a mere murmur for you. You will also wish to help - but only those whose distress you understand entirely because they share with you one suffering and one hope - your friends - and only in the manner in which you help yourself."

(GS 338)[37]

(the source from which I originally got this quote appears gone, but i see this link on [archive.org](#).)

So I would argue that Nietzsche is pointing out something that is very natural: that we want to help the people we consider to be our friends, and we are often motivated to do that with more enthusiasm than when we act for our own sake.

I might also combine this with an allusion to the common idea that if we were marooned on an island or another planet with no company at all we would soon either go crazy or lose the will to live or both - sort of how we might feel if we were the only survivor of a nuclear war.

So there are lots of ways to stand up in public and say that because you in fact value your own interest, and that you identify your own happiness with that of your friends, just as Epicurus advised, you are not only as trustworthy as anyone else, you are more trustworthy because you place your actions on a strong practical foundation and not on a make-believe supernatural god or ideal morality.

Post by “Cassius” of October 17, 2025 at 10:42 AM

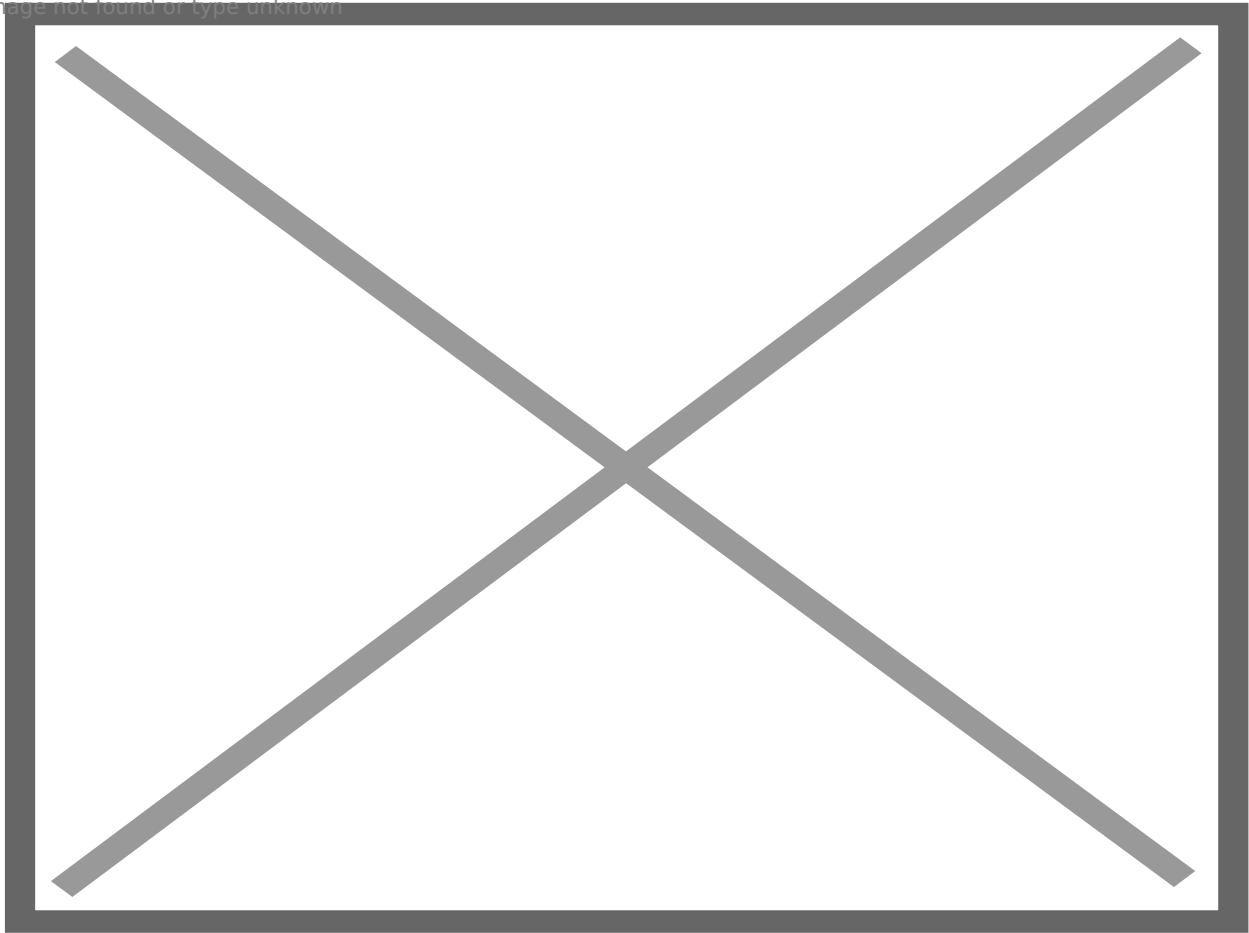
Episode 303 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week our episode is entitled: "Is It Truly Impossible To Advocate For Epicurus In The Public Sphere?"

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/68179312/media>

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2025 at 2:26 PM

Substack transcript version of this podcast available here:

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[Is It Truly Impossible - As Cicero Alleges - To Advocate For Epicurus In The Public Sphere?](#)

From Episode 303 of the Lucretius Today Podcast

epicureanfriends.substack.com

Post by “Don” of October 18, 2025 at 2:29 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Substack transcript version of this podcast available here:

<https://epicureanfriends.substack.com/p/is-it-truly-impossible-as-cicero>

Oh! This makes searching for particular parts SO much easier! Thanks for this! Are you planning on posting episodes going forward?

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4753-episode-303-td31-is-it-truly-impossible-to-advocate-for-epicurus-in-the-public-s/>

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2025 at 3:06 PM

Planning yes, but schedule unknown. It's a big effort. However I am coming around to the idea that the podcast audio versions can serve as a "first draft" that when edited further turn into really good articles with wider impact. So yes I am going to work on more of these!

Post by “Don” of October 18, 2025 at 3:06 PM

Quote from Cassius

Cicero is mischaracterizing what Epicure says about pleasure, and secondly he's mischaracterizing what Epicure says about doing everything for your own advantage. Epicurus never says that the Epicurean standard is pleasure, and anyone who's at all familiar with what Epicurus does say knows how much emphasis Epicurus places on his friends and the pleasure of his friends, and how much we value that type of pleasure which comes from engagement in society and working with light minded people. Epicurus is not always looking to his own advantage.

This could be a matter of semantics, but I'm going to push back ever so slightly on the "Epicurus is not always looking to his own advantage." Pleasure is subjective. The only standard we have to assess if we're living happily/pleasurably is ourselves. We can only, in the end, "look to" our own happiness/pleasure. That isn't to say we don't care about other people. Our friends' happiness affects our own happiness, but it still means we help them in service to a wise selfishness for ourselves. They happy = I happy.

Post by “Don” of October 18, 2025 at 3:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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FWIW: We use Temi/Rev for our transcription on our podcast: <https://www.rev.com/pricing>

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2025 at 3:26 PM

Thanks I will look into that! The existing podcast provider does have a transcript, but it is not very good.

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2025 at 3:29 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

, but I'm going to push back ever so slightly on the "Epicurus is not always looking to his own advantage." Pleasure is

Yes I agree and realized that during editing that I should have been more precise. I intended to strongly emphasize the "his own" to show that he was looking at this very broadly and factoring in how other people affect him, but that didn't come across and i fully agree with your point.