

Episode 315 - TD 42 - Preventing Pain From Destroying Happiness

Post by "Cassius" of January 2, 2026 at 4:22 PM

Welcome to Episode 315 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.

We are closing in on the end of those portions of Tusculan Disputations that are most relevant to Epicurean philosophy today, so we'll pick up this week after [Section 27 of Part 5](#).

Quote

XXVII.

But to dismiss the subtleties of the Stoics, which I am sensible I have employed more than was necessary, let us admit of three kinds of goods: and let them really be kinds of goods, provided no regard is had to the body, and to external circumstances, as entitled to the appellation of good in any other sense than because we are obliged to use them: but let those other divine goods spread themselves far in every direction, and reach the very heavens. Why, then, may I not call him happy, nay, the happiest of men, who has attained them? Shall a wise man be afraid of pain? which is, indeed, the greatest enemy to our opinion. For I am persuaded that we are prepared and fortified sufficiently, by the disputations of the foregoing days, against our own death, or that of our friends, against grief and the other perturbations of the mind. But pain seems to be the sharpest adversary of virtue: that it is which menaces us with burning torches; that it is which threatens to crush our fortitude, and greatness of mind, and patience. Shall virtue then yield to this? Shall the happy life of a wise and consistent man succumb to this? Good Gods! how base would this be! Spartan boys will bear to have their bodies torn by rods without uttering a groan. I myself have seen at Lacedæmon, troops of young men, with incredible earnestness contending together with their hands and feet, with their teeth and nails, nay even ready to expire, rather than own themselves conquered. Is any country of barbarians more uncivilized or desolate than India? Yet they have amongst them some that are held for wise men, who never wear any clothes

all their life long, and who bear the snow of Caucasus, and the piercing cold of winter, without any pain: and who if they come in contact with fire endure being burned without a groan. The women too, in India, on the death of their husbands have a regular contest, and apply to the judge to have it determined which of them was best beloved by him; for it is customary there for one man to have many wives. She in whose favour it is determined exults greatly, and being attended by her relations is laid on the funeral pile with her husband: the others, who are postponed, walk away very much dejected. Custom can never be superior to nature: for nature is never to be got the better of. But our minds are infected by sloth and idleness, and luxury, and languor, and indolence: we have enervated them by opinions, and bad customs. Who is there who is unacquainted with the customs of the Egyptians? Their minds being tainted by pernicious opinions, they are ready to bear any torture, rather than hurt an ibis, a snake, a cat, a dog, or a crocodile: and should any one inadvertently have hurt any of these animals, he will submit to any punishment. I am speaking of men only. As to the beasts, do they not bear cold and hunger, running about in woods, and on mountains and deserts? will they not fight for their young ones till they are wounded? Are they afraid of any attacks or blows? I mention not what the ambitious will suffer for honour's sake, or those who are desirous of praise on account of glory, or lovers to gratify their lust. Life is full of such instances.

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Post by “Cassius” of January 2, 2026 at 4:30 PM

In this week's text Cicero is going to say "*For I am persuaded that we are prepared and fortified sufficiently, by the disputations of the foregoing days, against our own death, or that of our friends, against grief and the other perturbations of the mind. But pain seems to be the sharpest adversary of virtue...*"

In that regard I want us to return to Cicero's statement in the preceding section "for I do not apprehend how past pleasures can allay present evils"

As I mentioned in the thread to last week's episode, this is a direct challenge for us to give our best reasoning to support the use of pleasures (of the past, present, or future) to "offset" or "array against" current pains.

- Quote

Nor did he take any trouble to provide himself with those remedies which might have enabled him to bear pain; such as firmness of mind, a shame of doing anything base, exercise, and the habit of patience, precepts of courage, and a manly hardiness: but he says that he supports himself on the single recollection of past pleasures, as if any one, when the weather was so hot as that he was scarcely able to bear it, should comfort himself by recollecting that he was once in my country Arpinum, where he was surrounded on every side by cooling streams: for I do not apprehend how past pleasures can allay present evils. But when he says that a wise man is always happy, who would have no right to say so if he were consistent with himself, what may they not do, who allow nothing to be desirable, nothing to be looked on as good but what is honourable? Let, then, the Peripatetics and old Academics follow my example, and at length leave off muttering to themselves; and openly and with a clear voice let them be bold to say, that a happy life may not be inconsistent with the agonies of Phalaris's bull.

Post by “Cassius” of January 8, 2026 at 3:45 PM

Episode 315 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week our episode is entitled: "Preventing Pain From Destroying Happiness"

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