

Episode One Hundred Forty-Six - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 02 - The Three Divisions of Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 4, 2022 at 11:03 AM

Notes from Podcast 146:

1:40 -- The Three Divisions of Epicurean Philosophy -- As presented by Diogenes Laertius and other Epicurean documents such as the poem by Lucretius *On the Nature of Things*, and also the Inscription of the Wall of Oenoanda.

--The Physics - the nature of the universe as a whole, the examination of the way things are and how things work from a natural basis as opposed to a supernatural basis, and place of humanity in the world and on the earth.

--The Epistemology and the Canonics - the science of how you know anything at all (what knowledge is possible and how you gain knowledge). How you gather evidence and process evidence, and form opinions.

--The Ethics -- how you should live after you understand the nature of the universe, and how you think about things through the canonics.

3:15 -- We are organizing our presentation according to the commentary of Norman DeWitt and we have talked about why that book is a good place to start. However some students who are serious in their studies are going to want to read the original extant texts as quickly as they can.

3:34 -- Books with which to begin Epicurean studies:

Lucretius' poem was Cassius first reading. For Joshua it was Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve*, and then the Stallings translation of Lucretius, and then Principle Doctrines and Vatican Sayings (Diogenes Laertius). Martin started with *Epicurus' Extant Texts* by Kraut (similar to Bailey) and recommends to read DeWitt next. Kalosyni started with *How to Be an Epicurean* by Wilson and the text of the Principle Doctrines and Letter to Menoecus.

8:59 -- Discussing Epistemology and Canonics at the same time - Letter to Pythocles -- manifold causes

13:28 -- 12 Fundamentals of Nature -- the ultimate distillation of his principles. That document does not exist today, but has been reassembled from information extracted from Lucretius' poem *On the Nature of Things* and *Letter to Herodotus*.

14:43 -- a second (large) epitome of physics which Lucretius used. 37 books on Nature by Epicurus.

15:53 -- Ethics -- 40 Doctrines and *Letter to Menoeceus*

16:11 -- Canonics -- *The Celestial Book* (which was lost)

16:40 -- Philodemus work *On Signs*; *On Methods of Inference*

17:43 -- Epicurus' relationship to Plato and Aristotle, and Pyrrho

18:49 -- *Letter to Herodotus* may have been the first literature that was put into the hands of any potential Epicurean

21:26 -- [Death is nothing to us](#) (and the *Tetrapharmakon*)

Understanding first about the way the universe works before jumping into this material

22:58 -- *Letter to Herodotus* and *Letter to Pythocles* gives a foundation that informs everything else

23:08 -- Joshua comments on Lucretius' poem -- lost 7th book might have been on the nature of the gods -- something to be studied later on in the study. And Joshua comments about how things are presented in *A Few Days in Athens*.

26:20 -- Best way to study is a brief overview and then move to the details. But the poem of Lucretius needs some preparation before reading to avoid being confused regarding the nature of the gods, that the gods are not interfering in human life.

27:40 -- the reason you shouldn't fear the gods, given in the *Letter to Menoeceus* and the *Principle Doctrines*, is that the gods aren't what we think of them; the gods are not involved; a perfectly blissful being would not take any interest in rewarding friends or punishing enemies on the small planet earth -- it is not an appeal to just a physics argument, but a logical argument derived from physics. Epicurus may have been talking to people who were all ready been familiar with physics of Epicureanism (12 Elementary Principles, etc) before coming to the understanding that that the gods aren't supernatural and not interfering in our lives.

29:27 -- The goal of pleasure -- as the right way to organize your life, how pleasure relates to happiness. Once you have eliminated the idea of following god or working hard to get into heaven. Feelings (pleasure and pain); calmness and tranquility; peace of mind; how pleasure relates to happiness.

30:55 -- good to start with reading a general summary. A map of the direction in which you are going, and what to study. Joshua mentions that there is a very good summary in Stephen

Greenblott's *The Swerve*

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32:20 -- Material written by people who were hostile to Epicurus. May have been recorded accurately, but the way they present it is in a critical manner (such as Cicero). In some translations of Lucretius, the translators distance themselves in the prologue (Bailey is not supportive of Epicurean Ethics). So any commentary present by these writers may not be consistent with what Epicurus actually presented.

34:58 -- There is a long list of denunciations of Epicurus and Epicurean philosophy out there in western literature -- Thomas More's *Utopia*, Dante's *Inferno*. When they come to a subject in this way, then their opinions and conclusions need to be scrutinized.

35:23 -- Lucretius was best accepted by his peers during his time, praise him and his ideas, compared to what we find during the Renaissance and the modern age, such as with Hutchinson, Lamban, Brown.

37:10 -- DeWitt says French and Italians more sympathetic to Epicureanism than the English - Pierre Gassendi (reintroduced Epicurean studies into the west) and Montaigne quotes Lucretius a lot and quite appreciatively.

37:43 -- Next Week: True Opinions vs False Opinions about Epicurus -- understanding this will help provide a framework for study.