

Episode One Hundred Two - Corollaries to the Doctrines - Part Two

Post by "Cassius" of December 26, 2021 at 7:37 AM

Alex thanks for the kind words about the podcast! We will do our best to keep feeding your appetite for our discussions! 😊

I have not read James Warren's book so i cannot comment with authority. I do think I can add something though:

1) i am confident that Warren's scholarship is good and that you will find much good material to consider on the points he is writing about. At the level at which he writes you can be sure that his sources are sound, and you'll no doubt gain a lot of good raw material to think about.

2) I do want to strongly note a general caution: James Warren is in my experience similar to Tim O'Keefe, who I would also make the same point as #1, but would have the same caution I am stating here. They write for an academic audience primarily, and not because they are primarily "advocates" for Epicurus. I don't know what their personal views are, but I find it very significant that you will rarely if ever see them citing DeWitt's analysis in their own books, except perhaps an occasional negative reference. I consider both Warren and Okeefe to be far too influenced by Stoicism, and my reading is that they are both of the view that you will often see criticized on this website as too far into the "absence of pain" viewpoint.

Without going too far down that rabbit hole again, I would urge you to read DeWitt before you read any of the more contemporary or the more specialized books. My experience is that someone at the beginning of their reading gets a good overall grounding in the big picture of Epicurus, especially as to how he opposed so much of Plato and Aristotle, then you will easily see how much is going on in Epicurus' mind beyond the "absence of pain" issue.

The alternative that I see occur far too regularly is that people will start with one of these "contemporary" books that focuses on "absence of pain," and that further pigeon-holes Epicurus in their mind as essentially the same as the Stoics but just with a twist as to word choice. Especially if you have an existing grounding in Buddhism or Stoicism or even just some types of modern psychology, it is easy to get the idea that this "absence of pain" issue is the key to everything else, and In my view that is a huge mistake.

So I would say to you what I would say to everybody: it is far better for you to read DeWitt's "general" treatment of the entire philosophy before you read any of the detailed presentations of the detailed sub-issues (like death, or on the gods, or on ethics of any kind). Maybe the best way to say it is that if you start with one of the sub-topics, you'll almost inevitably be presuming that you understand Epicurus' basic perspective (based on what everyone knows from high school or wikipedia) and you will dramatically underestimate him. I think Epicurus needs to be

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viewed essentially as a total revolutionary against much of existing Greek philosophy and religion, and it's far better to wipe your attitude of everything you think you know about him at the very beginning. Then as you gather all the additional data you will get from Okeefe and Warren and others you will know how to respond to it, because you'll begin to think as Epicurus did and you'll know what to test the varying opinions against.