

Episode 150 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 06 - Development of the School in Mytilene and Lampsacus

Post by "Kalosyni" of December 7, 2022 at 12:52 PM

My notes from the Episode 150 podcast (may contain spelling errors)

1:50 -- Epicurus' time in Mytilene, a city on the island of Lesbos. Mytilene was a hotbed of Platonist philosophical thinking, and Aristotle actually taught there himself before going to Macedonia to tutor Alexander the Great.

3:10 -- This is the first place that Epicurus sets up his philosophy against the philosophical milieu, and he gets run out of town.

6: 25 -- Tortoise and Achilles

7:30 -- My grandfather's shovel

9:10 -- Grains of sand and a heap/non-heap

12:15 -- Resolutions of the heap/non-heap problem

13:50 -- If you start removing body parts at what point do you harm your soul

14:25 -- Joshua: these paradoxes are intellectually stimulating but are not useful in epistemology (in Joshua's opinion)

15:25 -- Cassius (flip-side to Joshua's opinion): these kinds of thought exercises, such as in Lucretius -- the issue of whether there is a boundary to the universe, by visualizing the throwing of the javelin -- and this is a way of expressing that there is a question that needs to be examined. Mind experiments are mind expanding and can point to conclusions.

16:30 -- Method of understanding: Do these concepts exist apart from objects which are right in front of you. Do complex concepts like capitalism, communism, socialism or any type of complicated conceptual relationship have definitions somewhere that everyone can be certain of, or aspire towards, or do we in fact have nothing but individual realities, and we are just using words to describe as best we can what those realities are.

17:02 -- Wikipedia lists as first example: The denial of the existence of the heap. A heap of sand is something that means something to us, we have to understand that what we are describing (as the heap of sand) is not ordained by god, set up by the universe itself in a

dimension like Plato would have it, and that is no essence of heaps as Aristotle might say. We got to understand both sides that yes it's useful to describe things with words, but on the otherhand these words don't have any objective meaning to them, established by god or by Plato's ideal forms or essences.

17:56 -- pg 72, 73 of DeWitt book -- Sorites syllogism (paradox)

When other philosophers talk about the good as a conceptual abstraction, Epicurus is saying to subtract various goods from the good and see at what point we no longer have what you're calling the good. Because if we subtract our sensations of taste, and vision and other sensed from our experience, what's left other than a stream of meaningless words, of the term "the good".

20:25 -- small changes vs large changes (Wikipedia chart on Sorites paradox)

22:30 -- looking at the chart of the green and the red, and could consider an analogy to virtue, there is no objective definition of individual virtues. You cannot separate virtue from actions which we decide to be virtuous.

22:50 -- pg. 73 DeWitt: "For my own part I am at a loss to know what meaning I shall attach to the good, subtracting the pleasures of taste, subtracting the pleasures of love, subtracting the pleasures of the ears, subtracting also the pleasure of the eyes in beauty of form and beauty of movement." (Tusc. Disp. 3.18.41; Athenaeus 280ab)

This gets to the heart of what Epicurus meant when he talks about pleasure.

23:25 -- Talk about it a lot as if we are contrasting Plato's view of the good vs Epicurus' view of the good -- and that Epicurus is say that the good is pleasure, but this is also an epistemological/logical aspect to it -- it shows you the way at which he is getting at the question -- how he is getting to the answer -- and this is applicable to the word "pleasure" itself -- that there is no ideal form of pleasure, or no definition given by god, or not essence of pleasure -- other than the individual pleasures that we feel and experience for ourselves.

24:10 -- The syllogism and its argument against Platonism would be of better use if restored into its dialog form, to be made more clear

25:25 -- Not just the pleasures of the mind but also the pleasures of the body

26:30 -- Subtracting until there is nothing left which the common person understands as good in everyday life.

27:04-- Epicurus' understanding of Homer and the Phaeceans -- the joys and pleasures of a banquet

Epicurus citing one of the Platonist's own authorities on virtue -- here's Homer praising pleasure and friendship, things that we can understand from our human lives identifiable with the

ultimate good. DeWitt says this would be similar to quoting the Bible in support of evolution.

30:30 -- word *euphrosenae* used by Plato and Aristotle to signify pleasure superior to hedone (pleasures of the body and pleasures of the moment) -- meaning the enjoyment of pure reason contemplating absolute truth -- that's the telos articulated by the Philobus dialog.

Homer as a hedonist

32:45 -- Sophecles -- pain is considered an evil -- Hercules cried out in pain

35:40 -- New book by Emily Austin

36:25 -- Anaxagerus had positions like the sun is not a god but instead a ball of hot metal, and he escaped and lived out his exile in Lampsicus

37:05 -- Epicurus used various methods to poke and prod the other philosophers in Mytilene, and so then he leaves and goes to Lampsicus, and meets many of the people who are to be his friends, companions, and ultimately his heirs at the school in Athens

38:50 -- when Epicurus gets to Athens he is no longer engaging others in the public square, because he sees where that leads with Anaxagerus and Socrates -- and so he establishes the Garden on his own private land -- school was taught in private

40:05 -- his views were different than the views of the established authorities and he could have ended up being charged as Socrates, as corrupting the youth

41:15 -- in applying Epicurean philosophy in the modern world, and can't expect just to talk about Epicurus as a philosopher of happiness or expect everyone to say "hey great!" -- when you start over-turning existing ideas and say that things need to be re-thought, it can create resistance (at 42:20)

42:40 -- reference to Emily Austin book

44:07 -- Joshua asks Cassius about his re-interpreting and continuing to interpret the texts on the forum

46:20 -- ideas which are difficult to let go of and which take time to let go of: the traditional western consensus about virtue, that there is an absolute virtue and absolute right and wrong; and determinism

48:30 -- take the time to read the material for yourself, be willing to think independently, be will to question basically everything you've thought previously -- almost a Neitzcheian type approach

49:05 -- need to take an approach which is opposite of "turn on, tune in, drop out" from the 60's -- So digging in to the reality and instead of dropping out engaging with things as "aggressively" as you can

49:40 -- Joshua talks about how his Epicurean ideas have evolved over time on the forum

50:50 -- learning is a process which you have to carry out over time, return to the source material, and yet also make use of books like Norman DeWitt's and Emily Austin's.

51:10 -- study these things with like-minded friends -- discussion and exploration together with others

52:30 -- question authority and use the faculties which nature gave you, to seek out the truth yourself