

Episode 153 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 09 - The New Education 02

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Welcome to Episode One Hundred Fifty-Three of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll 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 you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

We're now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy."

This week we are going to speed through the early development of the school before we turn to detailed treatment of individual philosophical topics:

Chapter VI - The New Education (Part 2)

- The Use of The Epitome
 - It is customary to classify Epicurus as an empiricist, because of his alleged reliance upon the sensations. To do so is to misunderstand the function of the Canon and to ignore the manifest procedures of his reasoning. One of his epitomes was devoted to the Twelve Elementary Principles of Physics. Since the procedure was to begin with these and to commit them to memory, it follows that the method was deductive throughout. These principles became major premises. Ideas arrived at by deduction from these were called *epinoai*, which by etymology means "inferential" or "accessory" notions. For instance, the third principle declared: "The universe consists of solid bodies and void." From this was deduced, on the principle of the excluded middle, the inferential idea that the soul is corporeal. Again, the fifth and sixth principles declared the infinity of the universe. From this was deduced, on a principle called isonomy, the existence of gods. Unless perfect beings existed somewhere in addition to imperfect beings, the universe would not be infinite; infinity applies to values no less than to space and matter. The function of the Sensations as part of the Canon is to test the correctness of the inferences drawn from the Twelve Principles. These Principles themselves were not based upon the evidence of the Sensations; the truth of them was demonstrated by a deductive

syllogism, as will be shown in the chapter on the New Physics.

- The New Textbooks

- The dogmatic writings comprised a series of textbooks on the Canon, Physics, and Ethics. Most of them were by Epicurus himself. The outstanding example was the thirty-seven on Physics. The refutative writings comprised a series belittling and refuting the teachings of all rival schools, especially the Platonists. An outstanding example was the letter of Epicurus entitled *Against the Philosophers in Mytilene*. The memorial writings consisted of sympathetic and eulogistic biographies of deceased members of the school. An example is the memoir of Epicurus on his brother Neocles. These three classes were logically integrated with the whole body of doctrine. Since Epicurus was convinced that his teachings were "true philosophy," the *vera ratio* of Lucretius, it followed that dogmatic textbooks were the requirement.
- (1) Since Epicurus was convinced that his teachings were "true philosophy," the *vera ratio* of Lucretius, it followed that dogmatic textbooks were the requirement.
- (2) Again, since the teachings of Epicurus were "the truth," it followed that all others were "false opinions" and "defilements." It followed likewise that the minds of novices must be kept pure from these and that the minds of converts should be purged of false doctrines already imbibed. To accomplish this second purpose was the aim of the refutative writings. These were not strictly controversial. They were not published with the idea that adversaries should reply in kind and be answered again. Satire was a frequent ingredient, such as the ridicule of the irony of Socrates.
- (3) The nature of the memorial writings has been completely overlooked but they belong no less logically in the scheme than the two previous classes. One of their aims was to confer a new kind of immortality upon deceased members of the circle. It was the teaching of Epicurus that happiness was attainable; it was possible for mankind within the limits of mortal life to approximate all but completely to the happiness of the gods. This happiness embraced two elements, blissfulness and incorruptibility. Although the soul of man was corruptible, it was still possible for the memory of him to be made imperishable in the records and in the rites of the Epicurean brotherhood. It was with the aim of securing this new kind of immortality for himself and his associates that Epicurus established during his lifetime the regular celebration of the twentieth in each month and provided for its perpetuation in his will. These celebrations were memorial sacraments and the memoirs of deceased members are comparable to the Acts of the Apostles and the Lives of the Saints in the Christian church. A number of specimens are extant in the usual fragmentary condition among the Herculanean papyri.

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