

A Worthwhile Podcast Episode Entitled: " Hume, The Epicureans, And the Origins of Liberalism"

Post by "Cassius" of May 1, 2024 at 10:46 AM

Followup discussion to [the post at the Facebook Group](#). This first YT post was in response to my post over there which was a slightly modified version of what I posted in post 1 above. There is also other conversation there but this is probably the most relevant to repost.

YT: Cassius That was pretty much my take on it as well. I also thought it was somewhat off the mark to describe Jonathan Haidt as conservative, but that was just a minor issue. Might be worth trying to get him as a guest on Lucretius Today to flesh out these questions about tradition vs naturalism, Epicurus, Jefferson and Madison.

JB: YT I don't think there would be anything gained by having this person as a guest on Lucretius Today. Perhaps I might want to know if he believed that there was a god who was watching his every move. Epicurus had the right answer to this!

Cassius Amicus: Yes the possibility of inviting him to our Epicurus podcast is definitely something to consider, but at present my thoughts are more like John's. I definitely found the professor - and the interviewer - to be likeable and intelligent and easy to listen to, but I suspect that the "Madison" orientation would invite more confrontation on religion than it would illumination as to Hume or Bentham or the rest. They might well be uncomfortable appearing on an explicitly "Epicurean" podcast with there being no way to bridge those deeper issues.

But I did find it remarkable to listen to them talk to each other and both seem to appreciate that there is more to Epicurus than meets the eye, and even when he disagreed with Epicurus the professor gave Epicurus credit for being the real "architect" of this position in the ancient world, and deserving of far more credit for his influence than he is given.

The professor's remarks to the effect that Epicurean theory of pleasure is too "light" (my word) to sustain a full moral theory is a common problem with lots of commentators, because they focus on the stimulative pleasures and then stumble over the "absence of pain" statements as essentially unintelligible, so they move on.

One day we're going to be able to make the case better that "absence of pain" is not a dark phrase but simply means all experiences of life, including all normal and healthy physical and mental existence, which are not explicitly painful. This formulation is clearly visible in Cicero's presentation of Epicurean ethics where Torquatus is explaining it, even giving examples such as the proper reply to Chrysippus' "hand" argument, but that kind of detail has simply not

penetrated the orthodox distaste for "pleasure" as a term.

I'd like to think that there is a younger generation that is immune to that older orthodoxy, and immune to the gloss-over that's been given to Epicurus, and that unpolluted attitude is what I hear in the voices of both the interviewer and the professor. They seem mystified that Epicurus has been given so little credit for his influence, and if they stick with the study long enough (and if they aren't so firmly in the grip of religion) then there's good reason for hope that new attitudes will eventually prevail.