

Klavan's "Gateway To Epicureanism" (Note: The Title Is Part Of A "Gateway" Series - The Author Himself Is Strongly Anti-Epicurean)

Post by "Cassius" of April 14, 2026 at 4:50 PM

Thanks again Brandon. I just finished listening to the podcast linked below in which Klavan was interviewed about this book. Worth mentioning first is that Klavan thinks that Epicureanism is something he would like to "demolish" and "eradicate." (Most of his own opinion appears around the 43 minute mark. I also recall him referring to it as garbage but that much be in another section,)

Now having said that, I want to at least recommend this podcast interview as well worth people here taking the time to hear. There is a lot of banter and fluff in the hour-long interview, but it's not Klavan's fault. The "Thinkery" podcasters sound almost as interested in joking around as being serious, but after a few minutes it settles down to being reasonably focused.

Klavan himself comes from a "faith" background (googling indicates father Jewish and mother some form of Christian but that could be wrong). I gather also that he is or was associated with "conservative" institutions such as the Claremont Institute. The interview cites Leo Strauss and others I am familiar with, so I think it's fair to describe him as coming from a "classical liberal" perspective. I don't gather that he is primarily Stoic or a particular religion but from a broad-based Platonic intelligent design perspective.

The interview spends considerable time with Epicurean physics, and here I strongly agree with Klavan's approach: The Epicurean view of the nature of the universe and "physics" is the basis on which everything else, including ethics, is built. If you think that modern science / math / geometry have disproven the core conclusions of Epicurean physics simply because what we can "atoms" are divisible, then you are going to reach Klavan's conclusion: Epicureanism in general is garbage and should be eradicated for all the damage that it does. And it makes no sense to try to defend the ethics if Epicurus' core conclusions about the nature of the universe are so fatally flawed.

Klavan is obviously very smart and well-read and he probably knows the standard view of Epicurus (which most of us here reject) better than most of our participants here. He even cited some Lucretian arguments (regarding the issue of whether sharp or smooth atoms cause bitter or sweet tastes) to explain part of Epicurus' sophisticated reasoning in defense of the senses. These are issues that he thinks are conclusive against Epicurus that we only rarely discuss here.

That's why I recommend anyone here who has the time to at least listen to the interview, if not the book itself. I still need to get my hands on that and see if there are excerpts worth reading.

But again if you can get past the fluff (as I did because I was driving) then Klavan himself knows what issues are important and how to cut to the chase on them. I think his core conclusions and evaluations of Epicurus are across-the-board wrong, but that's not to say that there's not a lot to learn from his commentary, just like we learn from Cicero and Plutarch, who he strongly resembles in the form of his criticisms.

As I understand what Brandenoz has written, the book itself does make an effort to cover at least some of Epicureanism in a balanced fashion, and apparently Brandenoz didn't come away from his contact with the book totally turned off to Epicureanism. That's one of the ways the "We are all Epicureans now" argument (made by John Adams as well) can lull people into complacency and misunderstanding (not referring to Brandenoz) . Probably there are a lot of people who are going to read this book and think that Klavan sounds fair and that his assessment of Epicurean philosophy should be believed.

That's a hazard of reading a book from someone who thinks that Epicurean philosophy is "garbage" and should be "demolished" and "eradicated." It's a shame he thinks that way, but this book and podcast give us an excellent opportunity to improve our own game in defending Epicurean philosophy.

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1ApdsiAnS489EFKsZRnWI2>