

Catherine Wilson interviewed by Michael Shermer

Post by "Cassius" of December 24, 2019 at 6:06 PM

More comments / observations after watching the whole thing. Before getting into the details, I think the major issues with her approach are contained in her statements at item 19 that she thinks that moral standards are timeless. This flies in the face of the last ten PD's in regard to justice not being absolute (in fact in the entire interview, in which there is much discussion of justice, she never mentions these issues):

(3) She says that getting into Epicurus was a pure intellectual exercise for her originally.

(4) At about the 12:30 part I applaud how they focus and reinforce that nothing can come from nothing.

(5) At 13:30 she says that it isn't clear what the Epicureans thought about color?

(6) At 15:00 she does a very good job of pointing out that the Epicurean position that atoms cannot themselves be conscious.

(7) At 16:25 she talks about "deserving" not playing a role in Epicurean ethics. Strikes me as very good. However she says there is a principle of "not doing harm to others" which is NOT correct. She takes this down the political rabbit hole for several minutes.

(8) At 19:12 talks about the need to take risks -- very good.

(9) At 20:30 there is a discussion about how to balance long and short term -- "pleasure seeking does not work well"???

(10) 22:03: Distinction between happiness and meaningfulness?

(11) 23:00 - distinction between Epicurus and Stoicism. Pretty good distinctions, especially on suppression of emotion.

(12) 26:57. She "absolutely" follows Epicureanism more than Stoicism.

(13) 27:00 Says stoicism found acceptance among people who were politically engaged. Says Epicurean advice was to stay out of politics and ** admits she is going outside Epicureanism to talk about politics.**

(14) 27:30 Talking about "rights" confuses the issues and is not helpful. (This is good.)

(15) (28:18) talks about abortion in Epicurean terms -- she says abortion is permissible but not infanticide. (questionable, in the sense of whether a general law applies to all, because she is emphasizing "Who is in human society - a political argument).

(16) 33:34 Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide -- Epicurus discouraged. "Nothing sacred about life because nothing is sacred." good.

(17) 36:34 Jeffrey Epstein 'suicide' Her feelings about that case are "complicated." "If I were Jeff Epstein I would want to kill myself." and she feels compassion for him. As an Epicurean she doesn't believe in "deserts" - what he deserves. Were his crimes horrific crimes - she says no.

(18) 40:46 He would not put Robert E Lee in the same category of Hitler or Goebbels. She brings up history of slavery (doesn't mention Epicurus' slaves).

(19) 43:27 He asks about applying modern moral standards to the past and she says "I think moral standards are timeless." HUGE PROBLEM

(20) 47:00 "the government needs to do something about reparations"

(21) 47:51 - again on the issue of judging past by present standards, she says: again she repeats "ethics is timeless" on the other hand she thinks it is a matter of "information" or "amount of discussion." (she is not sympathetic to the Joe Biden example he raises).

(22) 52:00 -- he again asks about universal ethics; her answer really not clear, but from his followup it is clear that she is really taking the "they should have known better" approach.

(23) 56:40 - He argues for eternal moral truths and says the universe is moving in that direction.

(24) 56:26 - She criticizes Epicurus' view of death in part but seems to generally endorse it. Endorses view that "purpose of life is to have lived."

(25) 1:00:00 - Question about epistemology. Her answer appears to be that she is endorsing confidence in science even where evidence is not complete. He misstates and suggests Epicurean position was "all things in moderation."

(26) 1:00:02 - She states the position that Epicureans were "abstemious"

(27) 1:04:00 - Question about meaningful life. She says that she does not "try for it." And she says pursuit of pleasure and meaning is not a good strategy!" She says engagement with things that speak to you.