

An Epicurean Podcast

Post by “Joshua” of July 5, 2019 at 2:49 PM

I consume a lot of audio, and am really feeling deeply the absence of a good podcast dedicated to Epicurean philosophy. I understand that maybe Oscar is working on something?

In any case, I have a pretty good voice (or so I'm told...I spent enough years working in drive-through restaurants to be confident of this). I've been kicking around an idea for some time, and I finally made a (very short!) recording.

My primary obstacles right now are that I live in a truck, I have no equipment, I don't entirely know what to talk about, and dealing with computers makes my head hurt.

However! I registered a few domains today, and I will be playing around with this idea further. So (if this blasted link actually works) I present my initial pitch for a new podcast...***A Mortal Brew.***

<https://soundcloud.com/user-220689716/mortalbrew-mp3>

Post by “Joshua” of July 5, 2019 at 3:02 PM

So what I'm thinking for a format is something like that for an opener. A few relevant quotes to kick off each episode, the "mission statement" script. Then a short instrumental, and then a brief outline of the subject for that show. After that, a longer reading from an epicurean text, and a "sermon" (for lack of a better word) on how the modern epicurean can apply the teachings to their own situation.

I want the show to avoid some of the abstruse textual sticking points, and the esoteric arguments over free will, etc. That stuff is all important, but what I would want to listen to would be a show that was simple, straightforward, repetitive on the important points; it should be the kind of content that inspires and affirms, and convinces the listener to go out and really USE the philosophy. Like a Christian devotional, or a Buddhist dharma-talk.

Post by “Cassius” of July 5, 2019 at 4:21 PM

You DO have an excellent voice for a podcast!! Reflective and serious without being over-the-top philosophically useless, if you know what I mean.

That is an excellent introduction too Joshua!

Many of us have been batting this around for months and even years without making any real progress. The real hurdle seems to be what you're referring to a the "mission statement." While we are all pretty much of the same mind when it comes to absence of supernatural gods and absence of life after death, the "positive" side -- (the meaning of pleasure as the guide) is something on which there is so much variety of opinion that I've found that to be a major obstacle.

One the one side you have those who stress simplicity/minimalism/absence of pain as the meaning of the philosophy, and on the others you have those (like me) who think that that approach cuts off the more important part of the philosophy, the part that stresses "***I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, of sex, of sound, and the pleasures of beautiful form.***" and which Cicero described disparagingly a " *to a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures*" which I also think is emphatically stated this way in [On Ends](#):

The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or by the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

In fact, I was recently circulating this clip from DeWitt's book on this very point:

Image may contain: text

Not every question has to be resolved before a project like a podcast or other outreach program can be started, but this one is so basic, and so divisive, that clarity on it at the beginning is probably required in order to avoid lots of problems dead ahead.

Post by "Cassius" of July 5, 2019 at 4:38 PM

Joshua I too consume a lot of audio podcasts, in my case (mostly in the past) listening in areas of two particular interests: keto/dietary advice podcasts, as well as linux for computers.

I have uniformly found the philosophy podcasts I have tried to listen to to be unhelpful. And I think a major reason is something you allude to as "esoteric arguments." Many of the philosophy podcasts I have listened to turn into "XX said this, YY said this, and that was a good point but MM had a better point....." and it all just goes round and round and round with no target ever reached. That may be a perfectly good format for a philosophy student learning to recite facts about different positions, but it's not a formula for putting out a positive program that actually helps somebody. It's necessary to take a position (which is really what the "dogmatism" charge is all about, rather than dance around every issue.

So I do think taking a position is important, but it's also true that even among students of Epicurus there are very different opinions on some fairly significant issues. I don't think we can ignore that those issues exist, but I think it is possible to state that they exist, give the arguments for each, and then put them aside in deference to the greater importance of the core points.

Issues about free will are a pretty good example, and probably issues about things like the canon and anticipations are of secondary importance. Quite a few podcasts could be done on the Epicurean view of gods, and the Epicurean view of death, without hitting too many divergences. (Of course there are issues as to interpretation of [Epicurean gods](#), but everyone is agreed that there are no supernatural gods.)

But when we then come to PD3 and PD4, especially if someone wants to refer to the "tetrapharmakon" we almost immediately hit what is probably the most important issue. Absence of gods and absence of life-after-death are relatively straightforward, but we also need to be clear on the positive side -- in the absence of gods and threat/punishment of afterlife, how does PLEASURE step into that role and provide us the guidance to live life. That is something where it will also be important to state the varying opinions, but it will also be the minefield that - if not navigated correctly - will blow up the whole endeavor.

Post by "Joshua" of July 5, 2019 at 4:47 PM

Thanks, Cassius. I think when it comes to hedone vs aponia, I'll damn the torpedoes and forge ahead ?

I go home for a week in August, so that's when I expect things will get rolling. In the meantime I'll be working on setting up a basic website to host it, getting together some equipment, making a logo, writing scripts, lining up some music if I go that route, etc.

In the meantime, I can still record passable mp3's with my phone mic. So I'll probably try and record some texts here soonish to get sharpen some vocal skills. I know there's an audio clip section somewhere, so I'll post those (or send them to you?) as they come.

Post by “Cassius” of July 5, 2019 at 4:48 PM

Yes please do, Joshua, and good luck!

Post by “Godfrey” of July 5, 2019 at 5:11 PM

One thing that I've noticed when I listen to podcasts is that having multiple people speaking is, to my ear, more engaging than just listening to one person for the entire podcast. This is true for podcasts of 30 minutes or more, which may be more than what you're thinking of Joshua. But an interviewer/interviewee format may be an effective way to present the material, especially on subjects where there is a divergence of opinion. Also, sometimes it works well to have two regular hosts, who could have differently nuanced positions. Of course these ideas add another layer of complexity to the task of getting things off the ground, so they may over the top at this point....

Post by “Joshua” of July 5, 2019 at 5:17 PM

That is the number one problem I have with this idea, Godfrey. My all-time favorite podcast is *Hello Internet*, and honestly I don't even care what they're talking about that day. Just two interesting and VERY different guys having an interesting conversation. I am nowhere near quick enough on my feet to do that kind of show.

Post by “Elayne” of July 5, 2019 at 5:28 PM

I like this idea, and especially focusing on applying the philosophy in everyday life! The most obvious times it comes into play are when we make decisions-- sometimes big life decisions, but also small ones. It seems to me that the small decisions often add up to the most effect in overall happiness. When someone wants to be happier, I think their daily schedule is the first place to start.

Post by “Martin” of July 5, 2019 at 8:26 PM

This podcast and the voice are excellent. The project is good.

I am a visual learner, especially from diagrams and text, less from photos (unless they are evidence for my work in failure analysis), so I rather avoid listening to podcasts. Even video clips are usually rather a diluted distraction than useful for me. Nevertheless, I will be happy to occasionally contribute again a podcast to Epicurean Radio.

Post by “Joshua” of July 5, 2019 at 10:12 PM

Thank you all. Looking forward to it. Carpe Diem, and all that!

Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2019 at 8:13 AM

There is almost no way to fail with that project. Even if you only get started and then stop, you will have learned a lot for the next try.

Post by “Hiram” of July 6, 2019 at 9:17 AM

Love it! Would love to help brainstorm content. I spent many hours commenting (and translating) Philodemus' scrolls for societyofepicurus.com and would love them to be discussed by others.