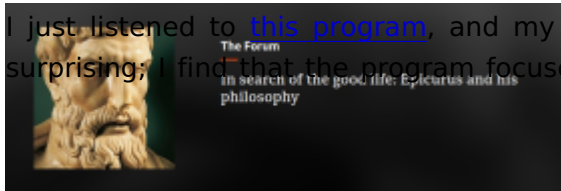


# BBC - The Forum - Interview With Catherine Wilson, David Sedley, Sonya Wurster (April 2020)

Post by "Cassius" of April 2, 2020 at 12:01 PM



I just listened to [this program](#), and my notes are below. Most of my comments will not be surprising; I find that the program focuses on many interpretations of Epicurus that I strongly disagree with. Catherine Wilson performs as she usually does - sometimes very well, but then ultimately just digging herself deeper into the well of (1) "absence of pain" as the focus of life rather than pleasure, (2) her list of political positions that she is confident that all Epicureans would agree with.

At one point around the 30 minute mark she starts down a very productive road of discussing how other Greek philosophers were hostile to pleasure, and she cited Plato's Phaedo beginning on that theme. That's a work I haven't checked and we need to investigate. Unfortunately she shuts herself down (or perhaps the interviewer clipped her answer) and she doesn't expand on what she is talking about or why her observation is important.

One point that I think noteworthy that I have not seen before occurs at 11:30 when the interviewer leads David Sedley to agree that the infinite universe argument leads one to conclude that eventually enough monkey will compose the Aenid. I do NOT believe that Epicurus would have agreed with that, and I would cite the arguments in Lucretius about the LIMITS of what combinations of atoms can do. This is an important point because it is related to issues of chance and chaos and determinism and I was very surprised that David Sedley did not swat it down.

The introduction is a mix of typical misleading superficialities about bread and water and cheese.

7:15 - Atomism. Very good discussion by Catherine Wilson. No souls, no ghosts, no supernatural divinities; no action at a distance, no sorcery. Interviewer accuses of contradiction with emphasis on senses; Wilson defends well.

11:30 Asks David Sedley about the swerve. He links to Heisenburg. Points out that Epicurus bases his argument on infinite universes. Problem: He agrees with interviewer on the Monkey typewriter argument!

14:18 Sonja talks about Philodemus not being an "atheist" in the standard sense. Interviewer pushes argument that Epicurus was hiding his true beliefs on gods. Sedley says Epicurus might have considered them just concepts - he says jury is out and you must read between lines.

Wilson refers to On The Nature of the Gods and common impression of mankind. Wilson argues that Lucretius is different from Epicurus and more anti-religious (I disagree that there is difference).

19:02 - Reader reads the Iphinessa passage from Book One (not sure what translation).

20:23 - Interviewer asks decent question about pleasure but NO! Wilson insists it is more important to focus to minimize pain than to pursue pleasure! Says also friendship is the greatest good!

27:08: "True happiness found in friendship and simple things in life"

27:39 - Sonya says that Epicurean pleasure is a "subdued sort of pleasure."

28:10 - Sedley says "when all pain is gone" this is the greatest pleasure. He says that adding things through luxury is just variety, not greater quantity. Sedley's explanation is not entirely clear

30:00 Wilson says that Epicurus had a modest view of pleasure, but she also says that the commentators have been hostile (cites Phaedo as ranting against pleasure). If she had gone further she was going in right direction!! But she stopped!

30:52 Sedley talks about reducing needs and doesn't answer the question about accepting an upgrade to a nicer seat on a flight. Free upgrade would be fine but not every time. Sonya says that you would not ASK for it! Sedley agrees.

32:00 Discussion of Stoicism starts. Wilson says stoicism is training your mind not to care about misfortune. Epicureans were "somewhat skeptical" of this - then Wilson stops!

34:00 Sedley says appeal of Epicurus to Italy is that it is easy to get started; no lessons in logic required;

34:30 Interviewer sees this as grass roots rather than top down philosophy. Sonya agrees; says Cicero was an elitist.

35:30 Sedley cites 1417 rediscovery that kickstarted Epicurean revival.

36:32 - Reading of atoms swerving from Lucretius Book 2

39:36 discussion of why people are interested in Epicuran ethics rather than physics

41:00 Sonya says that her students find Epicurus more interesting than most. They see it as a foil to the material world they live in because you don't need a lot to be happy (good grief).

42:30 Catherine Wilson says No wars for ideology, no autocratic leaders, nobody would try to amass great quantities of wealth, people would accept science, people would choose friends by who they liked, People would be ecologists. Epicureans emphasize making do with less and focusing on books and conversations and that we should scale back expectations and

ambitions.

-----

Released On: 02 Apr 2020

The popular view of an Epicurean is that of somebody who focuses on pleasure as our guiding principle, indulging in the finer things of life to achieve happiness. And yet what the Ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus understood by pleasure was far more nuanced. In fact, Epicurus and his followers advocated a simple lifestyle, withdrawn from society, where we are content with little.

What is perhaps less known is how Epicurean writings on physics foreshadowed some of the most significant developments in early modern science – including Darwin’s theory of evolution and even Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle.

Joining Bridget Kendall is Catherine Wilson, visiting Professor at the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York, and the author of various works on Epicureanism, including *How to Be an Epicurean: The Ancient Art of Living Well*; Dr Sonya Wurster, Honorary Fellow at La Trobe University in Australia who’s working on a book about the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus; and philosopher and historian David Sedley, Emeritus Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Cambridge, and the author of numerous publications on Greek and Roman thought.