

# Episode 153 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 09 - The New Education 02

Post by "Cassius" of December 16, 2022 at 4:38 PM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Fifty-Three of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

We're now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy."

This week we are going to speed through the early development of the school before we turn to detailed treatment of individual philosophical topics:

## Chapter VI - The New Education (Part 2)

- The Use of The Epitome
  - It is customary to classify Epicurus as an empiricist, because of his alleged reliance upon the sensations. To do so is to misunderstand the function of the Canon and to ignore the manifest procedures of his reasoning. One of his epitomes was devoted to the Twelve Elementary Principles of Physics. Since the procedure was to begin with these and to commit them to memory, it follows that the method was deductive throughout. These principles became major premises. Ideas arrived at by deduction from these were called *epinoai*, which by etymology means "inferential" or "accessory" notions. For instance, the third principle declared: "The universe consists of solid bodies and void." From this was deduced, on the principle of the excluded middle, the inferential idea that the soul is corporeal. Again, the fifth and sixth principles declared the infinity of the universe. From this was deduced, on a principle called isonomy, the existence of gods. Unless perfect beings existed somewhere in addition to imperfect beings, the universe would not be infinite; infinity applies to values no less than to space and matter. The function of the Sensations as part of the Canon is to test the correctness of the inferences drawn from the Twelve Principles. These Principles themselves were not based upon the

evidence of the Sensations; the truth of them was demonstrated by a deductive syllogism, as will be shown in the chapter on the New Physics.

- The New Textbooks

- The dogmatic writings comprised a series of textbooks on the Canon, Physics, and Ethics. Most of them were by Epicurus himself. The outstanding example was the thirty-seven on Physics. The refutative writings comprised a series belittling and refuting the teachings of all rival schools, especially the Platonists. An outstanding example was the letter of Epicurus entitled *Against the Philosophers in Mytilene*. The memorial writings consisted of sympathetic and eulogistic biographies of deceased members of the school. An example is the memoir of Epicurus on his brother Neocles. These three classes were logically integrated with the whole body of doctrine. Since Epicurus was convinced that his teachings were "true philosophy," the *vera ratio* of Lucretius, it followed that dogmatic textbooks were the requirement.
- (1) Since Epicurus was convinced that his teachings were "true philosophy," the *vera ratio* of Lucretius, it followed that dogmatic textbooks were the requirement.
- (2) Again, since the teachings of Epicurus were "the truth," it followed that all others were "false opinions" and "defilements." It followed likewise that the minds of novices must be kept pure from these and that the minds of converts should be purged of false doctrines already imbibed. To accomplish this second purpose was the aim of the refutative writings. These were not strictly controversial. They were not published with the idea that adversaries should reply in kind and be answered again. Satire was a frequent ingredient, such as the ridicule of the irony of Socrates.
- (3) The nature of the memorial writings has been completely overlooked but they belong no less logically in the scheme than the two previous classes. One of their aims was to confer a new kind of immortality upon deceased members of the circle. It was the teaching of Epicurus that happiness was attainable; it was possible for mankind within the limits of mortal life to approximate all but completely to the happiness of the gods. This happiness embraced two elements, blissfulness and incorruptibility. Although the soul of man was corruptible, it was still possible for the memory of him to be made imperishable in the records and in the rites of the Epicurean brotherhood. It was with the aim of securing this new kind of immortality for himself and his associates that Epicurus established during his lifetime the regular celebration of the twentieth in each month and provided for its perpetuation in his will. These celebrations were memorial sacraments and the memoirs of deceased members are comparable to the Acts of the Apostles and the Lives of the Saints in the Christian church. A number of specimens are extant in the usual fragmentary condition among the Herculanean papyri.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/52262474>

## Post by “Cassius” of December 22, 2022 at 7:30 PM

Episode 153 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we complete Chapter 6 and discussion of "The New Education." One thing I would like to point out about this episode is that we spent a significant amount of time near the end discussing the issue of "certainty" and "confidence." That's a perfect setup for next week's episode, where we will begin discussion on Chapter 7 on the Epicurean canon of truth.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/52262474>

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## Post by “Don” of December 27, 2022 at 12:22 PM

About halfway through and had a thought about being open to other ideas, etc. At least the Epicureans didn't walk themselves off from other philosophers' ideas. The number of books they wrote against other schools show that they definitely engaged with other ideas. To counter them and argue against them, of course; but they were engaged in the marketplace of ideas.

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## Post by “Todd” of December 27, 2022 at 1:13 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

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I feel like you are baiting me, Don, and I'm not above taking it! 😊

That is all true, of course. But I think a more focused approach is required when trying to clarify (or communicate) one's own ideas.

Also, since this is a thread about DeWitt, it seems appropriate to cite him for support:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2789-episode-153-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-09-the-new-education-02/>

## Quote

In the case of the refutative writings...the objective was not victory in controversy, but rather to discredit all rival teachings...and to insulate the minds of disciples against all other doctrines.

I take that with a grain of salt, though, as possibly an over-broad generalization. Still, I think it makes my point that different approaches are required in different contexts.

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### **Post by “Don” of December 27, 2022 at 1:43 PM**

My question with DeWitt is: Where is he getting this? How can he make those broad statements when we don't even have the texts?

DeWitt did a lot of "historical fiction" writing on the flimsiest (or non-existent!) of evidence... In my opinion.

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### **Post by “Todd” of December 27, 2022 at 1:50 PM**

Yes, agreed.

In this case, the only clue to DeWitt's reasoning given in the text is the ~~extensive~~ use of satire. Presumably one would not use satire to engage in a debate with rival philosophers, in which one expected to be taken seriously.

That does indeed seem like flimsy evidence.

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### **Post by “Don” of December 27, 2022 at 4:04 PM**

All we have from the Letter to the philosophers of Mytilene that Dewitt references in that "satire" section:

[Epicurus: Fragments - translation](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2789-episode-153-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-09-the-new-education-02/>

[ U113 ]

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Philosophers, X.8: Furthermore, Epicurus himself in his letters says of Nausiphanes: "This so maddened him that he abused me and called me a didaskalon." {="pedagogue," a trite, pedantic teacher} Epicurus used to call Nausiphanes a pleumonon. {="jellyfish," imputing obtuseness and insensibility}

U114 ]

Sextus Empiricus, Against the Professors, I.3: Epicurus, then, though he had been one of this man's disciples, did his best to deny the fact in order that he might be thought to be a self-taught and original philosopher, and tried hard to blot out the reputation of Nausiphanes, and became a violent opponent of the Arts and Sciences wherein Nausiphanes prided himself. Thus, in his Letter to the Philosophers of Mytilene, Epicurus says, "I quite suppose that 'the bellowers' will fancy that I am even a disciple of 'the jellyfish' having sat under him in the company of some crapulous striplings;" whereby he calls Nausiphanes a "jellyfish" as being without sense. And again, after proceeding further and abusing the man at length, he hints at his proficiency in Arts and Sciences when he says - "In fact he was a sorry fellow and exercised himself on matters which cannot possibly lead to wisdom," alluding thereby to Arts and Sciences.