


Lecture on practical application of Epicureanism

Post by “TauPhi” of November 25, 2024 at 12:35 PM

An interesting ~50min lecture by Kurt Lampe focusing on practical application of Epicureanism. First 7min are dedicated to general introduction after which the proper lecture starts. Mr. Lampe asks intriguing and sometimes inconvenient questions (e.g., is Epicurean typology of desires useful in real life? And if yes, to which extent?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZZ5G8KGM2E>

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 25, 2024 at 4:42 PM

I give this video:  ...because it has a number of incorrect concepts...and it seems to be saying that the goal is to avoid distress.

Post by “Cassius” of November 25, 2024 at 4:54 PM

I agree with Kalosyni but thanks for posting it Tau Phi! It's a recent attempt at a general presentation on Epicurus by a professor, and he's honest that he doesn't represent himself to be presenting Epicurus favorably. It's good for us to see these and think about how they could be done better.

One initial thought I have is that he is clearly aware of On Ends Book One and how Torquatus sets up the issue (asking what is the highest good) but instead he just cherry picks some points (the natural and necessary division and friendship) and as a result of losing their context what he picks out seems incoherent.

And he never once says (as far as I picked up) that Epicurus advised that we will sometime choose pain in order to achieve a pleasure that is worth more to us than the pain that is involved.

Post by “Pacatus” of November 25, 2024 at 6:48 PM

Just to note, Lampe is author of *The Birth of Hedonism: The Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life*, which I read.

One of the interesting things that I recall is that, on what are often taken to be the major differences between the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans - i.e., the Cyrenaics' emphasis on physical, as opposed to mental, pleasures; and a strict “presentism,” as opposed to including future considerations in building a life of *eudaimonia* - Lampe argues that, although they are differences, they are more differences of degree than of substance. For the rest, ask me no questions! 😞 😄

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 26, 2024 at 7:39 AM

In this video he emphasizes mental pleasures, but we have in both Diogenes Laertius and Cicero's Torquatus section that it is both physical and mental. (and there are other sources).

Post by “TauPhi” of November 26, 2024 at 10:10 AM

With all due respect, [Cassius](#) and [Kalosyni](#) , I think you missed the purpose of the lecture completely. The purpose is to present few areas of Epicureanism and make people think about how and to what extent practical application is beneficial. It's about questions like: Can I take 3 types of desires as described by the philosophy and use this knowledge in everyday life successfully? Do I need something else or is it sufficient to make good decisions? Did Epicureans got friendship right? Should I change something in my approach towards my friends? What are the personal implications of acknowledging pleasure as the good? etc.

I think these are interesting questions to focus on instead of deconstructing the lecture for no other reason than showing if the presenter is 83% or only 68% accurate in his presentation of Epicureanism as you understand it. It's not an advanced course in the philosophy. And even if you're only interested in exposing how wrong the dude is, make sure you give valid arguments. Accusation that he's cherry picking makes no sense. This lecture is exactly about cherry picking. It's not a complete presentation of Epicureanism in 50min (which is impossible to do even if tried, which is not here). The lecturer picked few areas only and he explicitly says so. I don't understand Kalosyni's point in post #5 either. Kurt Lampe makes it crystal clear that for

Epicureans all pleasure is good. Both mental and physical.

Post by “Don” of November 26, 2024 at 1:24 PM

I wasn't going to weigh in but curiosity got the best of me. He's only looking at 3 potential applications of Epicurean philosophy, so he's not going to be comprehensive in any way. Plus he says several times that the ancient philosophies (and his lecture) are meant to be provocative and engender discussion.

~7:35: "pursuing pleasure and thinking about the value and nature of pleasure and avoiding pain and distress"

I have no problem with this formulation in a broad sense. The word *αταραξία* (ataraxia) literally means an absence of distress, turbulence, trouble, confusion. From my perspective, the lecturer provides a feasible distillation of one aspect of what Epicureanism is about.

Contentment or satisfaction - Primarily "the lived experience of a person whose body and mind are in a good condition." That makes one feel good. I have no problem with this, and, from my perspective, this even gets at the "whatever does not cause pain is pleasure" that has been discussed on this forum. I do think the lecturer muddies the water around the 19 min mark when he talks about events vs contentment.

I would agree with Cassius that the lecturer doesn't talk about pursuing pain in order to enjoy a greater pleasure, but I think that might be nitpicking in the wider scope of what the lecture is trying to do. He does talk about variety of pleasures (when he talks about the decision of whether or not to have a Coke)

Overall, any halfways decent exposition of Epicurean philosophy out there (that isn't just Stoicism/Buddhism-lite variety of Epicureanism) is a bonus from my perspective.

His examples of "extravagant" desires seem pretty on the nose.

I like his "The typology in itself won't help us answer these questions!" I realize he doesn't quite go where I'd like him to go, but the typology of desires DO NOT tell us what to do. It provides a framework within which to ask ourselves the questions of whether or not something will bring us pleasure or pain.

I wasn't aware of that Philodemus quote, but I like it: "though many fine things result from friendship, there's nothing so great as having one to whom you will say what's in your heart and to listen when the other speaks. **For our nature strongly desires to reveal to someone what it thinks.** (σφόδ[ρ]α γὰρ ἡ φύσις ὀρέγεται πρ[ό]ς τινὰς ἐκκαλύπτειν ἃ

[ν]οεῖ.)" (On Frankness of Speech, Fragment 28)

[] -ca.?- [] κα-]


[λ]ῶς ὁ Φιλῶ[ν]ε[ίδ]ου(*) θηρευτής· κὰν π[ε]ριδεικνύμεν ἐπιλογιστικῶς, ὅτι πολλῶν καὶ καλῶν ἐκ φιλίας περιγινόμενων οὐδέν ἐστι τηλικούτον ὡς τὸ ἔχει<ν>, ὡὶ τὰ[γ]κάρθ[ι]ά τις ἐρεῖ καὶ λ[έγ]οντος ἀκούσεται. σφόδ[ρ]α γὰρ ἡ φύσις ὀρέγεται πρ[ό]ς τινὰς ἐκκαλύπτειν ἃ [ν]οεῖ. λοιπὸν δὲ ...

He gives 5 other things he *could* have talked about, so he is VERY aware that his is not a comprehensive exposition.


Personally, I'd give it a C+/B for usefulness to our needs here at the forum... not the least as a starting point for discussion.

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 26, 2024 at 2:01 PM

I just don't have time to go through that video and list everything that seems incorrect to me.

 It's like we are one step away from having quite an assortment of "Epicureans" or "Epicurean beliefs" such that there are three blind men in a room with an elephant and one feels the trunk, one feels the tail, and one feels the leg.

The antidote to this situation is that folks ought to create an outline of what they believe are the Epicurean tenets, and include the sources in the texts. Also updating the outline when there is a change in how one sees things. I myself need to do a better job of outlining with sources.

And then there would be no need to post outside videos on the forum, as we could be making our own videos instead. 

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 26, 2024 at 2:03 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

It's about questions like: Can I take 3 types of desires as described by the philosophy and use this knowledge in everyday life successfully? Do I need something else or is it sufficient to make good decisions? Did Epicureans got friendship right? Should I change

something in my approach towards my friends? What are the personal implications of acknowledging pleasure as the good?

These are good questions to include in a personal outline.

Post by “Pacatus” of November 26, 2024 at 2:42 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The antidote to this situation is that folks ought to create an outline of what they believe are the Epicurean tenets, and include the sources in the texts.

For me (just myself) that would be a lot of busy-work that would just distract from my attempts (and sometimes struggle) to apply Epicurean thought – as best as I interpret it at the time – to my daily living. The test of those interpretations (mine) is how they work to enhance my eudaimonia (*hedone, aponia, ataraxia*) – without regard to whether they are “heterodox” or “orthodox,” or who judges that. That's not to say that such a practice might not be helpful to someone else.

Sometimes I share my interpretation. Sometimes (often) feedback may cause me to reconsider and revise that – but always, for me, it will come back to personal practice and experience: that, for me, is the ultimate canon.

I do not criticize – let alone dismiss! – the scholarly work that goes on here (translation, analysis, interpretation, etc.). It has helped me.

Addendum (sorry): I did do a personal outline when I first came here; I've revisited it a couple times. Maybe will again, if I think it will be helpful on my journey. 😊

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 26, 2024 at 2:53 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

Accusation that he's cherry picking makes no sense. This lecture is exactly about cherry picking.

The antidote to cherry picking is making a personal outline AND that outline needs to be backed up with references to specific quotes in specific texts.

In this video he makes statements that are not backed up by specific quotes from the texts.

Every person should study the textual sources themselves rather than take anyone's interpretation (even a professor's interpretation).