

"On Methods of Inference": Notes For Review And Discussion (Including David Sedley Article: "On Signs")

Post by "Cassius" of August 26, 2021 at 8:38 PM

Not gonna get off on this right now, but we ought to make note that if this assertion is correct it plays into "isonomia" and probably "nature never makes only a single thing of a kind." I haven't looked up this reference in Lucretius:

...accepting by default what the community takes to be common sense phenomena. Unfortunately most pass that test too, and all of those must therefore be accepted as true, if not in our world then at any rate in some part of the universe, whose infinity guarantees that all possibilities are realised (Lucretius v 326-33).⁷² If, then, the multiple-explanation principle is an answer to the problem of choosing between existing cosmological doctrines of equal explanatory power, it may well be that a similar motivation lies behind the claim that for the basic laws of physics only one theory is consistent with phenomena. For Epicurus did not regard his own system as definitively established until he had shown rival physical theories to fail the test of consistency with phenomena. Books xiv and xv of his work *On Nature* were probably devoted to this enterprise,⁷³ and are represented for us in Lucretius by the refutations of Heraclitus, Empedocles and Anaxagoras (i 635-920).⁷⁴ Thus Epicurus' methodology arises from something re-

⁷² See under the various names of the Presocratics in the *Index* assistance to H. Usener's *Epistulae* (1987). I have argued against the convention that Epicurus despised all other philosophers and denied any debt to them in "Epicurus and his professional rivals" (in "Essays on Epicurean antiquity", ed. J. Bollack, A. Laks, *Colloque de Philosophie* (1998), 139-164).

⁷³ Where a plurality of uncontestable explanations is found for a single class of phenomena, e.g. weather-signs, lightning (Ep. Pyth. 98-102), they are accepted as all *concurrently* true even within our world: it must be where they all account for an individual, if *severally* phenomenon, e.g. the waxing and waning of the moon (88d. 94-5), then not more than one is held to be true in our world, and the others true for similar phenomena elsewhere. Lucretius' methodological pronouncement at v 326-33, and his parallel of the corpse for which we can only list the possible causes of death and know that only one is true, yet cannot say which it is (81 303-11), matches the second kind of case, but not the first.