

"Setting Before the Eyes"

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2022 at 6:51 PM

Thanks Don for starting this. I will try to edit and reconstruct some of my comments that we made in private. I apologize that in pasting them here there is not an entirely logical flow between them, but I think the points are relevant to the conversation, which I hope will go on much further into the details:

OK I see that I need to add Tsouna's book to my reading list, and I see why it is so attractive to Hiram (and no doubt many people) because it has a section on Therapeutic exercises. It says clearly that Philodemus was purposely going outside Epicurean doctrine. I think we can add this to the list of examples where the later Epicureans were not uniform in their views and that there were controversies as to who was or was not straying outside of Epicurean doctrine -- for good or for bad effect will be an individual contextual issue.

[2497-pasted-from-clipboard-png](#)

As to "setting before the eyes" I see she refers to this as the "so-called technique" of bringing-before-the-eyes. I wonder if anyone else in the world prior to or other than Tsouna herself identified this with specificity or called it that. I do think that in the syncretic approach there is a tendency to pull things out of context and make something different of them than existed in the original context. Maybe this is important, maybe it is not, but I generally like to see the issue stressed by the founding authorities before I accept that it was important to them (much like the issue of katastematic/kinetic distinctions).

[2498-pasted-from-clipboard-png](#)

Looks like there is another reference too, Don --- Tsouna 2003

[2499-pasted-from-clipboard-png](#)

[&thumbnail=1](#)

As to Philodemus in general and his reliability:

In my opinion Philodemus is in a gray area and he's definitely not a "Founding Authority" in the sense of Epicurus or Metrodorus or Hermarchus. By the time he was writing it's likely that there were significant divisions (and Philodemus reports on them) including those issues documented by Cicero/Torquatus such as:

- How much logical exposition is appropriate to establish that pleasure is the good
- How to look at "friendship."

And I bet by this point there was probably the division too noted by Diogenes Laertius as to a "fourth leg of the canon." Since we're talking here about visualization it's interesting to think about whether that could be related to the "fourth leg" controversy.

I'm not trying to be argumentative (against Philodemus or anyone else! 😊). I think these are fascinating issues on which we have to keep an open mind. I do generally think that when we have a reliable text of Philodemus saying something we have a very high value source that is entitled to a lot of respect. However it's hard to say whether what is being reported has some overlay of Philodemus' own view vs that of Epicurus himself, and I think we always need to be alert to that.

I think we today have an incentive to see things that might not really be there, like Dewitt with Christianity. We're all doing the best we can to reconstruct the wider positions from narrow evidence, and it's easy to make mistakes and go too far. If the person doing the writing isn't rigorously protecting their views from outside "pollution" from their own viewpoints, then it's easy to see what we're looking for. I don't really have a grip on Tsouna's personal perspective other than to observe that she seems to rather frequently disagree with Sedley, whose instincts I personally find more likely to be similar to Epicurus.

Also keep in mind that being a lawyer I do like to constantly pit testimonies and opinions against each other, and in doing so I am not necessarily questioning the good faith of any of them, just trying to test their accuracy from different perspectives.

It's interesting to compare perspectives on how to judge Philodemus vs Lucretius. Philodemus might well have been the smarter person and a major thinker in his own right. Lucretius might have been "just" a poet. But if Lucretius was rigorously following the original texts of Epicurus, that makes him possibly a better source.

Which is a way to bring us around to the fact that the very first words of that section on Epicurus in Book One are "Ante oculos." I didn't have time to search Tsouna to see if she incorporates that in her analysis of the technique.

Note: I mean how much is there that Tsouna is able to cite? Is it a clear section that states "We have an very important Epicurean technique called 'setting before the eyes' or is it just a phrase that appears several times as a natural result of thinking that it is important to visualize what we are talking about? I just haven't read enough to be sure.

I just finished reading Tsouna's introduction to Ethics of Philodemus. She is very clear as to the very great difficulties in the reconstructions, and that there is a lot of room for reasonable people to differ in interpretations of what she is writing about.

I think it's critical to keep those caveats in mind, and that's one of the concerns I have about the article(s) we are talking about. Frequently I don't see any reference at all to the textual uncertainties, and Tsouna's conclusions are presented (and again I am referring to these articles, and not to her) as if they are certain and that we should accept them without question as equal to the best documented texts. And I think that's a very dangerous approach apt to create conflation and improper syncretism (the words of the week!)