

Sextus Empiricus

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2022 at 1:17 PM

Thank you too Nate! The entire subject of Pyrrhonism (is *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* available today?) should be a topic of study for us. I feel confident that in that study we would learn a lot to the effect of why and how Epicurus rejected it, and that would really help give shape to what we do know from the remaining Epicurean texts.

Sort of like everyone today presumes Epicurus was the same as a modern atheist, most people seem to presume that he was a radical skeptic, and they kick back when confronted with the clear evidence to the contrary. It's the issue of whether anything is knowable, and where the line is in where we can have confidence in our knowledge.

Like Diogenes of Oinoanda said in Fragment 5:

Quote

[Others do not] explicitly [stigmatise] natural science as unnecessary, being ashamed to acknowledge [this], but use another means of discarding it. For, when they assert that things are inapprehensible, what else are they saying than that there is no need for us to pursue natural science? After all, who will choose to seek what he can never find?

Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.

Digging all this out would be a lot of work but very rewarding. To many this can seem like a side issue, but it really informs the whole Epicurean attitude toward life, to not give in to nihilism and despair at finding anything to be knowable, but to dig in with confidence after getting an understanding of "knowability" in the first place.