

Episode 234 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 09 - Dealing With Marcus Aurelius And The Canonical Basis For the Epicurean View Of Divinity

Post by "Don" of July 1, 2024 at 10:21 PM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Criterion 1: the text is the chief constraint. If we want to take Epicurus on his own terms, the text itself has to support, or at least not decisively rule out, a viable reading, and I prefer, all things considered, to keep my body of primary text reasonably narrow (as in, what we have from Epicurus, not what Plutarch or Clement of Alexandria say about Epicurus).

I concur with that. While not using Plutarch, Clement, et al. limits what's available, limiting oneself to *actual* Epicurean writings at least removes some of the likely anti-Epicurean bias inherent in "quotations" from those opposed (vehemently) to the Epicurean school.

Where do you come down on Cicero? Valuable? Reliable? LOL I find Cicero insufferable as a commentator, but he preserved some pivotal information... but how much to trust him as a conveyor of Epicurean teaching?

Curious also about your view of using the Herculaneum material: Philodemus, the fragments of *On Nature*, and so on. I'm *inclined* to make use of it where there is a reasonable amount of intact text, but skeptical of a lot of what might need "reconstruction."

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Criterion 2: I know this is contentious, but I also think we should seek the most philosophically and empirically charitable account the text can sustain.

Sure, I got no problem with that. We have such little text (although, relatively speaking, we have a treasure trove!) that we have to read between the lines sometimes.

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

That means we should rule out interpretations that unnecessarily saddle Epicurus with untenable positions, if a more plausible position can be attributed to Epicurus within the bounds of textual evidence.

Yep, agree with that as well.



For me, an example of this idea would be that Epicurus was an ascetic as seems popular in some circles. A more plausible position from my perspective is that he may very well have tested himself from time to time to see how much he could live on and still be satisfied... but I certainly don't see him doing this day in day out. I have source amnesia but seem to remember one author talking about "from time to time" Epicurus would test the limits of this kind of thing and to better appreciate abundance when one has it. I think of Lent or Ramadan in a regular religious context.

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

Which is to say I think it's totally fine, Don, to consider whether Epicurus might be in striking distance of what might count as a viable contender of a view today. I think it's always good to ask, 'how close is he to our current understanding?' Even if, in the end, it turns out the answer is, 'nowhere near.'

I can see that. I think my issue is trying to retrofit modern understanding into an Epicurean context. That's why I think (and, trust me, this is a recent realization on my part) it's vitally important to understand what Epicurus thought, taught, and understood within his own contemporary historical and philosophical context. Once *that* is reasonably well understood, then we can look for parallels or echoes or similarities to modern understandings. Heck, the ancient Greeks coming up with *atoms* - fundamental building blocks of matter common to everything across the cosmos - is pretty darn impressive... even if our modern "atoms" are not *per se* Epicurean or Democritean "atoms." Coming up with a material cosmos and making supernatural gods unnecessary was a great leap forward. It wasn't science but it gets you walking toward a scientific understanding of the universe. Kudos to them!

That said, I'm finding that I'm unable to be as generous when it comes to the psyche and the mind and memory and all that. Our minds don't seem to grasp eidola from their air to conceive of things. Is it impressive that Epicurus posited a material cause for sensation, and the interaction of "soul atoms" to describe the activity of what is actually the human nervous system? You betcha! But Epicurus was working with a completely different paradigm when it comes to the mind. I just don't think we'll find exact parallels of prolepsis from a modern understanding... but I remain open to the idea!! There are several old posts of mine where I've done exactly that after all 😊 For example...

Thread

[Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett on The Functions of the Brain](#)

I just started reading Dr. Barrett's book *How Emotions Are Made* (2017) and find it fascinating. I just finished the first chapter, so, in looking for something to listen to on the treadmill this morning, found her TED talk.

I see implications and applications to Epicurean philosophy (I think). She talks about the basic

experiences all humans have from birth like pleasure and displeasure (I'm calling that pain). Overlaid on these basic sensations are the emotions our brains build from contextual...



Don

December 15, 2020 at 7:49 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/conversation/381-homeostasis/>