

Epicureanism and Scientism: What are the main differences?

Post by "Cassius" of July 24, 2024 at 10:36 AM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

I was reminded of a passage I read recently about Epicurus' indifference to finding the right explanation. Actually it seems like more than indifference--he actually recommends not getting invested in finding the actual explanation.

Would you not add the important caveat that he would recommend not getting invested in finding "the" actual explanation *when you know in advance that that isn't going to be possible due to the lack of evidence?*

It seems to me that this from the letter to Pythocles pretty clearly delineates the times when we **do** want to be dogmatic (when we have sufficient information from things on earth that show us clearly how to live) from the times when we **don't** want to be dogmatic, and the difference seems pretty clearly based on the availability of evidence:

Quote from Letter to Pythocles

[86] We must not try to force an impossible explanation, nor employ a method of inquiry like our reasoning either about the modes of life or with respect to the solution of other physical problems: witness such propositions as that 'the universe consists of bodies and the intangible,' or that 'the elements are indivisible,' and all such statements in circumstances where there is only one explanation which harmonizes with phenomena. For this is not so with the things above us: they admit of more than one cause of coming into being and more than one account of their nature which harmonizes with our sensations.

[87] For we must not conduct scientific investigation by means of empty assumptions and arbitrary principles, but follow the lead of phenomena: for our life has not now any place for irrational belief and groundless imaginings, but we must live free from trouble.

Now all goes on without disturbance as far as regards each of those things which may be explained in several ways so as to harmonize with what we perceive, when one admits, as we are bound to do, probable theories about them. But when one accepts one theory and rejects another which harmonizes as well with the phenomenon, it is obvious that he altogether leaves the path of scientific inquiry and has recourse to

myth. Now we can obtain indications of what happens above from some of the phenomena on earth: for we can observe how they come to pass, though we cannot observe the phenomena in the sky: for they may be produced in several ways.

It would be pretty easy to conclude from thinking that Epicurus didn't *care* about knowing the right answer to reaching some dramatic conclusions about being right and wrong that would seem to me to go far astray from the general tenor of his attention to detail in the whole philosophy.