

Possibilities For Shorthand Rating System For Indicating Reliability Of Texts

Post by "Cassius" of September 21, 2024 at 7:01 AM

I doubt that I will pursue this myself much further, but since I wrote this up as a comment to graphic I thought I would post it separately in case someone thought it was helpful for their own thinking. I'm not at all sure that such a thing would be practical, but thinking about the factors that would go into any such system is probably a good exercise:

I wish we had some shorthand way of indicating a reasonable level of confidence for a particular passage of text. Maybe we ought to create a thread to explore some kind of ranking system that would include factors like:

1. A rating of how intact the text is vs how much is reconstructed.as a percentage of words and whether those reconstructions are of critical portions.
2. A rating as to whether they key point of a text is repeated in other reliable authorities.
3. A rating of the reliability of the supposed original author (with Epicurus being the gold standard and someone like Horace being less reliable)
4. A rating of the "transmitter" that takes into account the viewpoint of the transmitter (those such as Diogenes Laertius being most likely to attempt to be correct while someone like Plutarch being inclined to cast negatively)
5. This would probably be hardest, but Perhaps even a rating of the "reconstructor" as to how well established they are or their level of "favorability" toward the point of view under discussion. For example the point of view of someone like David Sedley on the texts is more known, but that of others is less known (or so I expect). Another example is Bailey, who was personally pretty disdainful of Epicurus' ethics and therefore might not work as hard to present them sympathetically, despite his general professionalism and credentials. Another example is the John Mason Good translation of Lucretius, which very non-standard (and not in a way that seems reliable or insightful).

No system would be perfect but maybe would be helpful. Not at all sure it would be practical, but some kind of shorthand way to indicate when texts are doubtful and when not would be useful. Even a description of such a standard would make an interesting reference article.