

Prolepsis / Anticipations As Epicurus' Answer to the MENO Problem

Post by "Cassius" of November 2, 2024 at 6:45 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

So, if you're saying that the "high-level summary of the details" is that "sensation and consciousness is the result of knowable physical processes" then, okay, that's not wrong.

Yes, that is what I am saying, just like I would still argue that it is useful to talk about "atoms" even though we use that term today to mean something other than what Epicurus would have meant.

[Quote from Don](#)

So, it seems to me he felt the broad outline was important to keep in mind at all times, but investigating how the world worked with "continuous energy" gives one the confidence to have "calm enjoyment of life."

Yes, I agree here too, but I would say that just like Polyaneus apparently pulled back from total focus on geometry / mathematics, it's only a certain type of person, and a relatively small number, who are going to want to focus on bleeding edge research as their primary focus. It looks to me like even Epicurus himself spent most of his time on higher-level / logical questions on how to fit the big picture together, and communicate the results to normal people so they could all live better lives in the time that they had. And I do think there's a theoretical problem that can occur from bleeding edge research. In a universe that is either actually infinite or essentially infinite, it needs to be understood and accepted at the start that it is absolutely impossible to know *everything* about *everything*. We therefore need a realistic attitudinal framework to incorporate that fact - that while we know we are not and never will be omniscient, we understand that some level of higher-level accuracy is "good enough," and that it is absolutely unnecessary and counterproductive to constantly doubt the big picture that has come into focus already.

[Quote from Don](#)

But like Alexander the Oraclemonger's snake god, I'm sure, in the end, there's a rational physical explanation for them...

That passage is one of the best examples from the ancient texts that we can cite. The mechanism of the snake may elude us now, or for a very long time, or even to our last moment of our life, but all the way through to that last breath we ought to be confident that there is a non-supernatural explanation for what we are seeing.

That's where we are going here - we're articulating a persuasive framework for understanding the nature of the universe that gives us that confidence. To get back a question raised in another recent thread, we're not pursuing pleasure because we have arbitrarily and unthinkingly decided that "pleasure" sounds good. We're pursuing "pleasure" because we have thoroughly considered the alternatives and decided that even though we need to be clear about what pleasure means and how to pursue it, the term "pleasure" - properly understood in a much wider sense than simply the sensual pleasures of the moment - is the best description that reflects the reality of nature.