

# Prolepsis / Anticipations As Epicurus' Answer to the MENO Problem

Post by “Pacatus” of November 2, 2024 at 1:32 PM

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,  
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,  
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,  
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

- Walt Whitman

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I think we can take the word “mystical” metaphorically here (or relating to feelings of awe, and not necessarily supernatural). I recall that Whitman was at least acquainted with Epicurean philosophy.

Not that scientific (and philosophical) inquiry and debate are not valuable (and sometimes pleasurable) – but that we, in the end, live in the day-to-day “real world”. Feeling pleasure in the “moist night air” and the starry expanse overhead. Where we make daily decisions about how we are to live: how to weave a life enriched by pleasure whilst minimizing pain and anxiety; how to celebrate simplicity; how best to love the ones we love; how to support our friends in troubled times; etc.

And that is, for me, where the meat and marrow of philosophy are.

And, yes, of course: “A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe, but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that, without natural science, it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed.” (PD 12)

And: “We must not pretend to study philosophy, but study it in reality, for it is not the appearance of health that we need, but real health.” (VS 54)

And: “Vain is the word of a philosopher which does not heal any suffering of man. For just as there is no profit in medicine if it does not expel the diseases of the body, so there is no profit in philosophy either, if it does not expel the suffering of the mind.” (U221)

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And, [Don](#) : If I came off as defensive, mea culpa. Didn't mean to. 😭😊