

Feedback From A User

Post by "Cassius" of February 13, 2020 at 5:00 PM

Lee:

I am vigorously hoping that someone is going to drop in and enlighten us and in a few sentences answers all our questions.

Failing that, however, I think you are going to find probably the best material answering your question in that DeLacey commentary, for example. All of this is very technical and as usual we are relying on commentators, some of whom are more sympathetic to Epicurus than others. I can't vouch for DeLacey but I remember thinking when I finished reading this work several years ago that DeLacey's interpretations seemed sound to me. This following clip is part of the material I linked in the last post above:

a conventional language was a purely practical evolution, and was not guided by any metaphysical considerations. The Epicureans thus rejected the various attempts of the rationalists to find some inner connection between language and ultimate reality.¹⁰ Yet the Epicureans maintained that on the empirical level language involves no distortion of reality. By a psychological and half-unconscious process based on accumulated experiences, objects have been divided into classes according to their similarities and differences; and by virtue of this process, which produces what Epicurus called "anticipation," or "apperception" (*προληψις*), the person who uses or hears a word knows the sort of object to which that word refers. This is not to say that there is any sort of mental entity to which words refer; it is rather an approach to the later nominalistic view that words refer directly to objects and that the role of the person who relates words to objects is a purely functional one. The validity of this function is assured by the fact that the "anticipation" is based on accumulated experience and thus represents a very broad induction.¹¹

Epicurus believed that an empirical system need not be limited to objects immediately perceived, but may include also objects beyond present experience. Some objects are as they appear manifestly. Others we are prevented from knowing as they are in themselves because of their minuteness or magnitude, or distance from the perceiver.¹² These, then, are unperceived (*ἀόηλα*) as far as our experience is concerned. Knowledge of them involves an inference beyond immediate sense data. Additional criteria are necessary for this extension of knowledge in order to determine which conclusions about the unperceived are true and which are false. Perceptions, being our immediate sensations, are always true; but inferences concerning that which is not directly or completely experienced may be true or false.

¹⁰ E.g. Plato's *Cratylus*; cf. Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.24.

¹¹ Cf. Bailey, *Gk. Atom.*, 245-247, 557-558.

¹² Sextus *Adv. Math.* vii.207-216.