

SOE5 - On Attestations

Post by “Hiram” of December 30, 2019 at 10:04 AM

In reply to [Cassius](#) ' feedback:

Quote

SOE5: Our words and their meanings must be clear, and conform to the attestations that nature has presented to our faculties.

Objection to SOE5: Of course we should be as clear as possible in using words. The issue is what is meant by clarity, and how we go about being clear. The issue that I detect in this tenet is that it carries the implication that nature has "testified" ("attested") some particular abstract truth that is the same for everyone. No, nature has not done that. Nature has simply provided us a set of faculties, including the ability to form abstractions (including words) and it is entirely up to us to convey meaning through the use of words or other methods that have been established in the past by agreement to be assignable to certain observations. Nature has not attested to anyone the meaning of "yellow." Nature has simply set up circumstances in a particular time and place that most humans visualize in a similar way under similar conditions, and to these conditions certain people have assigned the word "yellow" while certain others in other languages have assigned other totally different words. The point that Epicurus was making about clarity, and avoiding going on infinitely without reaching any conclusions, is tied totally to the fundamental that observations are contextual and that different people experience things differently. Clarity comes through examples, not by connection with some abstraction made by supernatural gods, ideal forms, etc.

An attestation is not "an abstract truth that is the same for everyone", it's a particular instance of direct perception of something.

This term, together with epíbole (most usually translated as "focusing") and a few others are mentioned.

The source here for attestations is Epicurus' "Against Empty Words" (we also made a video about it)

<http://societyofepicurus.com/reasonings-abo...of-empty-words/>

Post by “Elayne” of December 30, 2019 at 11:47 AM

Hiram, I will argue from reality, since we differ on how and whether Epicurus and others understood reality.

We can only have direct perceptions subjectively, as individuals. Then if we want to communicate our perceptions, we have to use a conceptual method, such as language, or try to _evoke_ those sensations in others, such as through art or by giving a person a cookie from the batch we just enjoyed.

If we use words that are not describing a perceptual reality, our communications become nonsensical and full of contradiction and paradox.

The words can't ever replace the perceptual reality, and thus one can endlessly deconstruct even the word "cookie" if one is determined to do so-- but one can't endlessly deconstruct the cookie itself, and if sugar is deconstructed into indivisible particles, it will have no taste. It's only as sugar molecules that it tastes sweet (yes, I know there are different sugars). So "sweet" and "cookie" describe a real perception but don't replace it.

Those kinds of words, where a person can provide a perceptual example, are different from words which include abstraction not demonstrable in perceptions. Words like "wellbeing" or "flourishing" include idealisms which will not be universally agreed on-- ideas which can't be demonstrated perceptually. Those words require other words to define them, whereas words based on perceptual reality can be shown to others, not just talked about.

I already had observed this, and I had read Wittgenstein, etc, about semantics, so when I read Epicurus' advice on clear communication, I recognized that he had figured this out. That he was saying not to argue about concepts/words that didn't have a direct perceptual reality behind them. That to quibble over the definition of sweet was just perverse, since we can all sit in a circle, pass around a bowl of sugar cubes, and observe on others' faces the same expressions we make when tasting the sugar. If we all then point at the bowl and use the words sugar and sweet, we've agreed on a shorthand to communicate our individual perceptions of the same object.

I was pleased to read those words of his-- it went towards me deciding he was a credible person.

Post by “Cassius” of December 30, 2019 at 1:11 PM

Hiram my issue here is probably mostly related to coming up with a word like "Attestation." Where do you get that and what is the purpose of seeming to coin it as if it means something specific?

Again, is not the entire point that, as Elayne describes, we are trying to use words to describe reality, and that this use of words is an individual contextual thing that is going to vary with circumstances?

Why imply that there is ever some kind of flash-point that changes this contextual explanation into something that is not contextual?

So that when you say

[Quote from Hiram](#)

An attestation is not "an abstract truth that is the same for everyone", it's a particular instance of direct perception of something.

... what is the authority and the reason for assigning a word "attestation" to a particular instance of combinations of perceptions?

Post by "Hiram" of December 30, 2019 at 5:38 PM

The source would be whoever translated the source, but also I did a search online for the word attest, which my immediate instinct is that it means "to witness", and this is what what came up:

verb

1. provide or serve as clear evidence of. "his status is attested by his recent promotion"
 - o declare that something exists or is the case. "I can **attest to** his tremendous energy"
 - o be a witness to; certify formally. "the witnesses must attest and sign the will in the testator's presence"

The obvious relation to the canon and to enargeía is that it implies that evidence is being presented to us and we are certifying it.

Post by "Cassius" of December 30, 2019 at 6:34 PM

OK I am not sure that we have a deep dispute here - all I am saying is that I see "attestation" as just another word for a particular type of evidence, and I don't see anything gained by using words that imply some special meaning. I don't think it sounds right to imply that "Nature" attests or witnesses or speaks to anything - we are really just saying here that all we can know about any situation comes to us through the 5 senses, the anticipations, and the feelings, and that we must do our best to be clear when we describe to others what these sources of information are providing to us.

But it is in the nature of the problem that Nature does not attach specific words or ideas to the things that we perceive, and so it's up to us to develop language and other systems that allow us to communicate with as much precision as we can.