

Epicurus On Truth And Falsehood: Statements by Sextus Empiricus / Article By Brown

Post by "Cassius" of July 20, 2020 at 1:09 PM

I am not confident that we should rely either on this writer or on Sextus Empiricus for a correct interpretation of Epicurus' views on "truth," but the material collected here is certainly something to consider, especially the paragraph where Sextus Empiricus is allegedly attempting to describe Epicurus' view on the subject. Full PDF is attached but I have clipped what appear to be the most relevant quotes. Most of the rest of the article is very complex speculation on the part of Bown.



Τὸ δὲ Ἐπικουροῦς τὰ μὲν αἰσθητὰ πάντα εὐαγὲν ἀληθῆ καὶ ὄντα, τὰ δὲ φησὶ γὰρ ἀληθῆ εἶναι τὰ λεγόμενα ἢ ὁμιλλόμενα ὄντων καὶ ὑπερβάλλοντα πᾶσι καὶ ψευδῆ ἔσθαι φησὶν ἀληθῆ τὰ αὐτὰ ὅσα ἔστιν ἢ λεγόμενα ἔστιν, καὶ ψευδῆ ἔσθαι φησὶ τὸ οὐκ ὄντως ἔστιν ἢ λεγόμενα ἔστιν· τὴν τε αἰσθητὴν ἀντιληπτικὴν εἶδον οὐκ ἀποπειρατέον αἰσθῆ, καὶ μὴτε ἀφαρτέον τι μὴτε προστιτέον μὴτε μετατιτέον τῷ λόγῳ εἶναι, θεὰ ποιεῖν τε ἀληθῆ καὶ ὄντα τὸ ἐν λαμβάνειν ὡς εἶχε φύσει αὐτὴ εἶναι, πάντως δὲ τὴν αἰσθητὴν ἀληθῆ ὄντα, τὰ θεωρητὰ ψευδῆ καὶ τὰ μὲν αἰσθητὰ εἶναι ἀληθῆ τὰ δὲ ψευδῆ, καθὼς πρότερον εἰδείξαμεν.

And Epicurus spoke of all perceptibles as true and as beings. For it made no difference to say that something is true or that it exists. After that he also gave an outline of truth and falsehood: 'True,' he says, 'is that which is as it is said to be,' and 'False,' he says, 'is that which is not as it is said to be.' And [sc. he says that] perception, being able to apprehend the things which are subjected to it, and neither subtracting, nor adding, nor changing anything—because it is non-rational—both is in all cases truthful and grasps that which is just as that very thing is in its nature. But [sc. he says that] while all perceptibles are true, judgements are different in that some of them are true and others false, as we showed earlier.

Sextus first reports the basic position: Epicurus thinks that all perceptibles are true and that they are beings. (The question whether perceptibles are beings is relevant because several philosophers are reported earlier in the survey to claim that perceptibles have an inferior ontological status and for this reason

More explicit commitments to the view are found elsewhere. While dismissing Epicurus' arguments for the truth-as-correctness of perceptions in his summary of the *Canon*, Diogenes Laertius writes, "And the fact that the objects of perception exist guarantees the truth of perceptions."⁵⁷ Presumably, the

55 In the course of this discussion, the Epicureans seem to have insisted that a future-tensed statement that is true-as-correct now is so in virtue of features of the present state of the world, rather than in virtue of the features of some future state of the world. I discuss their views in some detail in *How and Why*—in that discussion, however, I remain neutral with regard to the precise nature of these worldly features.

56 Cf. *De signis* 116: *si intelligitur quod aperiens non videtur esse nisi adfuerit adfuerit. I read the *intelligitur* as 'object of perception' on the model of *adfuerit*, which clearly has this meaning in *De signis* 105. For example, 105: *videtur et intelligitur videtur*; "perception"—the meaning given by 112—would make poor sense of the sentence as a whole, but for a different view, see Long and Sedley 97b, 4, 8, 9.*

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'objects of perception' (*si intelligitur*) are the same predicative complexes elsewhere called 'perceptibles' since their existence is regarded as sufficient for the truth-as-correctness of the corresponding perceptions.⁵⁸ Here, then, Diogenes quite clearly reports that it is the existence of predicative complexes that guarantees the truth-as-correctness of the corresponding perceptions; this can be taken as an explicit assertion that the former is responsible for the latter.

This post comes about, and is related to, this discussion here: [References to Epicurus' Attitude Toward The "Place of the Sciences And Liberal Arts"](#)

Post by “Cassius” of July 20, 2020 at 1:27 PM

Also from [the letter to Herodotus](#):

Quote

Now falsehood and error always lie in the addition of opinion with regard to what is waiting to be confirmed or not contradicted, and then is not confirmed or is contradicted.

For the similarity between the things which exist, which we call real and the images received as a likeness of things and produced either in sleep or through some other acts of apprehension on the part of the mind or the other instruments of judgment, could never be, unless there were some effluences of this nature actually brought into contact with our senses.

And error would not exist unless another kind of movement too were produced inside ourselves, closely linked to the apprehension of images, but differing from it; and it is owing to this, supposing it is not confirmed, or is contradicted, that falsehood arises; but if it is confirmed or not contradicted, it is true.

Therefore we must do our best to keep this doctrine in mind, in order that on the one hand the standards of judgment dependent on the clear visions may not be undermined, and on the other error may not be as firmly established as truth and so throw all into confusion.