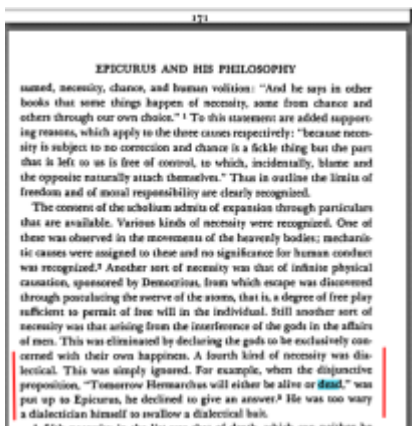


Propositional Logic, Truth Tables, and Epicurus' Objection to "Dialectic"

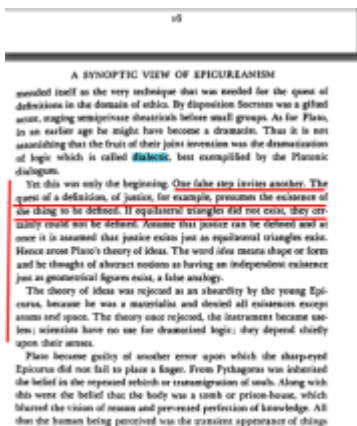
Post by "Cassius" of September 17, 2021 at 5:13 AM

Examples:

Reference in DeWitt as to the Hermarchus example (however DeWitt is probably wrong in this first one to say Epicurus "ignored" the issue - the reason we have the example is that he was giving the proper response to the problem):



Searching for "dialectic" in EHP produces a huge number of hits. Here are some of the most on point:



Another:

How the new terrestrial order of nature and the older celestial order operate as poles of departure for inferential truth may be illustrated simply in the case of justice. For Epicurus the feelings are the criterion. Injustice hurts and justice promotes happiness. Therefore human beings make a covenant with one another "not to injure or be injured." Justice is this covenant. It is of Nature. No dialectic is necessary to discover the fact; it is a matter of observation. The sense of justice is innate; it is an Anticipation of Prolepsis existing in advance of experience and awaiting experience. Even certain animals possess it: elephants, for example, the bulls escaped, do not injure one another and they marshaled the herd to protect one another against injury from outside.

Plato, on the contrary, taking his departure from the analogy between geometry and ethics and politics, requires a definition; dialectic is invoked in the *Republic* and the ten books of the *Republic* are devoted to the quest. In the background are the mathematical notion of unity and the musical notion of harmony. Thus at long length the conclusion is reached that justice is a harmony of the three commitments of the soul, reason, passion, and desire. Justice in the state is a harmony of the constituent classes.

Plato was complicating philosophy for the few who find self-gratification in complexity. Epicurus was simplifying philosophy for the many who were willing to live by their philosophy. Platonic justice seemed to him a specious pretense. In Vatican Collection 34 he wrote: "We should not pretend to philosophize but philosophize honestly, because it is not the semblance of health we need but real health."

Another, as to education:

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EPICURUS AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

THE PANDRA FALLACY

No correct understanding either of the schooling of Epicurus or of his later attitude toward education is possible without uncovering and dispelling a fallacy based upon the ambiguity of *paideia*, which means either "education" or "culture." This fallacy is the most regrettable because magnified by modern scholars. There is extant a saying of Epicurus which may be rendered: "To sea with your swift ship, blessed boy, and free from all education (*paideia*)."⁴³ To Epicurus this meant the Platonic curriculum of education then in vogue, that is, geometry, rhetoric, and dialectic. Ancient detractors, however, exploiting the ambiguity, insisted that it applied to all culture, including the traditional education in music and literature. Plutarch added literary and Quiritilian school the general association.⁴⁴

There is a similar saying of Epicurus, which unattended may be rendered as follows: "Bravo, my lad! I congratulate you upon beginning the study of philosophy free of all indoctrination."⁴⁵ Plutarch, although ambiguously, makes it clear that the lad was congratulated "because he had kept himself pure by abstaining from the studies."⁴⁶ What was meant by "the studies" need occasion no perplexity; they were the geometry and arithmetic required by Platonian or peripatetic. Modern scholars, however, fell into the trap laid by the ancient. They missed by substituting the word *paideia*, found in the previous saying, and translating "pure of all culture." One scholar even erred to read "pure of all delinquency."⁴⁷

This willful misrepresentation in ancient times and continuance in modern times has been a source of some serious mischief. Epicurus is

The intellectual grounds for rejecting dialectic were equally fundamental. Epicurus denied categorically each of its four assumptions, first, that reason was the criterion, second, that assumptions were independent, third, that phenomena were existing and objective, and fourth, that the sky, sea and eternal existence were the ideal. The reality of the ideas he denied on the ground that nothing exists except atoms and empty space. In place of reason he declared Nature to furnish criteria of truth and he held the Simulacra, represented by the Feelings and innate notions (Anticipations), to be direct and immediate contacts with external reality, whether physical or social. Thus dialectic became a superfluous.

The rejection of Plato's teachings is almost total. If the Authorized Doctrines be read from its text it may be observed that almost all are contradictions of Plato, and that it becomes plainly manifest that the writings of Plato occupied the chief place in the youthful studies of Epicurus. The Platonic dialogues were the textbooks of dialectic and its modern purfance would be "required reading."

This almost total rejection does not, on the contrary, preclude extensive borrowing and adaptation on the part of Epicurus. Dialectic by virtue of its dramatic form is committed to a very casual employment of a great variety of analytical tricks and logical devices. It incidentally is

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philosophy. He proposed to put the idea in: "For just as there is no profit in medicine unless it expels the disease of the body, so there is none in philosophy either unless it expels the malady of the soul!"¹⁸ With Democritus himself Epicurus was impatient because of his implicit dualism, which to him was a sort of pessimism paralyzing to action.

Epicurus is thus seen emerging as a natural pragmatist, impatient of all knowledge that lacks relevance to action. Plutarch [describes](#) how to him a superficial and confused "walking around vaguely and harping upon the general, When is the meaning of 'good'?"¹⁹ At times his real becomes truly religious, and his language anticipates the terminology of the New Testament. Of this a specimen is his advice to the young

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EPICURUS AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

Pythacles: "From the outset you must believe that no other end is gained from the knowledge of celestial phenomena, whether viewed in their associations [with the actual deities] or by themselves, than peace of soul and an abiding faith."²⁰ He did not believe in "following the logos" nor in following "knowledge like a sinking star beyond the utmost sound of human thought." The thing of supreme urgency was not knowledge but the happiness of mankind. He called his teachings "true philosophy," but they approximated to a religion. He claimed for himself the title of "sage," but he was really a prophet.

When once Epicurus had discovered himself as a prophet and a pragmatist, a dynamic significance was injected into the analogy between philosophy and medicine. Unlike the Platonist, he was bound to be concerned not only with abstract ideas but also with human beings.

NAZZARI ON GEOMETRY

This exclusion of idealism and the rejection of figurative language is consistent with another dictum of Epicurus: "The wise man will leave writings behind him but he will not compose panegyrics."²¹ It was in composing such speeches for festive occasions that the rhetoricians really gave themselves free reign and swung over to the domain of poetry.

The same priority of Nature over reason that predetermined the right kind of writing and rendered rhetoric superfluous eliminated dialectic, but the logic of this judgment can be given more precision. The effect of the doctrine that nothing exists except atoms and void was to deny the reality of Plato's eternal ideas. Thus [dialectic](#), which was the avenue to comprehension of those ideas, became a superfluity. The sentiment of Lucretius is explicit: "Dialectic they reject as superfluous, for it should suffice physicians to get along with the names of things as they find them."²² While this advice seems to overstep the recommendation concerning style, the application is different: it means that the quest of definitions is useless. This quest is capable of formalizing in fantastic concepts, such as Other, Some, and Essence in Plato's *Timaeus*, possessing no meaning unless on the highest level of abstraction. Since Epicurus rejected the reality of the eternal ideas, such terms could possess no meaning at all. Hence the following dictum: "There are two kinds of inquiry: the one about realities, the other making up its words without sense."²³ In the same vein is the advice to the young Herodotus to take words at their face value "so as not by our madmen's attempts to define have all our ideas in confusion or have more vocables than mean anything."²⁴

As a parting comment it may be stated that, when once Nature has been established as the norm, it follows logically that man should live

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