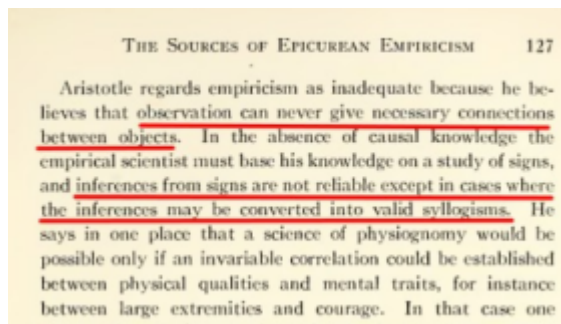


Propositional Logic, Truth Tables, and Epicurus' Objection to "Dialectic"

Post by "Cassius" of September 21, 2021 at 5:49 PM

Probably better to say that he is responding to formal arguments about why Epicurean reasoning is insufficient by pointing out that all methods of verifying the truth of arguments based on formal logic ultimately themselves trace back to the senses / canonical faculties.

That sentence I keep highlighting in Delacy I think is most illustrative: The non-Epicurean Greeks allege that nothing can be confidently considered to be true unless you can supposedly validate the assertion through propositional logic.



The flaw in that argument is, as we discussed, that the propositions have no inherent "necessary" connection to true reality, so that all attempts to verify any logical proposition ultimately depend upon the senses.

In addition, the question arises as to under what circumstances an EPICUREAN is justified in asserting the truth of any assertion that cannot be verified through the senses themselves (such as assertions about places you have never been before).

The opponents allege that propositional logic is the best way to make assertions about issues such as that.

Philodemus argues that sufficient confidence can be attained in assertions about things which have never been experienced based on principles of analogy, without the use of dialectical logic.

That's the reference by Diogenes Laertius this way, where he emphasizes "analogy, similarity, and combination" - means which are unrelated to propositional logic. If I recall Philodemus goes into a number of examples, or at least emphasizes this argument, as the proper response to reliance on propositional formal logic:

Logic they reject as misleading. For they say it is sufficient for physicists to be guided by what

things say of themselves. Thus in *The Canon* Epicurus says that the tests of truth are the sensations and concepts [preconceptions / anticipations] and the feelings; the Epicureans add to these the intuitive apprehensions of the mind. And this he says himself too in the summary addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#). For, he says, all sensation is irrational and does not admit of memory; for it is not set in motion by itself, nor when it is set in motion by something else, can it add to it or take from it. Nor is there anything which can refute the sensations. For a similar sensation cannot refute a similar because it is equivalent in validity, nor a dissimilar a dissimilar, for the objects of which they are the criteria are not the same; nor again can reason, for all reason is dependent upon sensations; nor can one sensation refute another, for we attend to them all alike. **Again, the fact of apperception confirms the truth of the sensations. And seeing and hearing are as much facts as feeling pain. From this it follows that as regards the imperceptible we must draw inferences from phenomena. For all thoughts have their origin in sensations by means of coincidence and analogy and similarity and combination, reasoning too contributing something. And the visions of the insane and those in dreams are true, for they cause movement, and that which does not exist cannot cause movement.**

(I gather that "apperception" is intended to refer to repeated perceptions, indicating that what confirms the truth of a single sensation is the repeated experience of the same perception under the same conditions.)

You get into issues here too that I think are related to Frances Wright. She ended up (wrongly I think) taking the position ultimately that NOTHING but observation is significant - that you should never develop any conclusions or theories based on those perceptions, you should just trace one perception after another so long as you remain interested. I think Philodemus is a good place where we see that that was not Epicurus' position: Epicurus was apparently very willing to embrace theories about things which cannot be perceived (such as atoms) despite accepting that he had never and will never perceive them. He avoids improper dogmatism by accepting that sometimes we have to "Wait" and sometimes we have to accept multiple possibilities without choosing between them. But I think the point that Philodemus shows is that Epicurus did not go Frances Wright's extreme.

What's left of "On Methods of Inference" seems designed to argue that Epicurean theory is that under proper conditions we can and should reach inferences (opinions as to what is true) about things which cannot be perceived directly.