

From The "Golden Mean" to the "Summum Bonum" - Useful or Deceptive Frames of Reference?

Post by "Don" of February 19, 2022 at 11:33 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I agree with most of what is written above, but one additional point I would include is that the Latin authorities were much closer to the Greek language and to the Epicurean texts than we will ever be (as to both).

I can respect where you're coming from, but it's still a secondary filter with their own cultural assumptions coloring the interpretation.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So when we know that someone like Lucretius is trying to be faithful, I think their interpretations are entitled to great deference, even to the extent of considering them to have much more expertise than our own efforts to grasp the Greek.

One issue with Lucretius is that we know virtually nothing about the person. Where did study? Did he just have access to Epicurus's On Nature and some letters and teach himself (granted, as we do!) or did he learn his Epicurean philosophy from an authoritative teacher of the school itself? I've seen some papers that argue he was unaware of some contemporary Epicurean thought.

As far as deference, my preference would be - wherever possible - to compare two Greek sources to see how they're using terms and concepts either in comparison or contrast. But again, I respect where you're coming from, but the Latin authors - especially Cicero - are still one step removed from the original sources. There's some evidence that Cicero used Philodemus for the Torquatus material. In which case, I'm going back to Philodemus and see where he can illuminate Cicero, not the other way around.

PS... I should say that it's not that I don't think the Latin sources are important! By Zeus, we have so few sources to begin with! But I am saying that, for me, defence will always be given to Greek sources. De Rerum Natura is priceless, *but* I want to squeeze everything I can out of every scrap of Lucretius's *sources* especially Epicurus's On Nature. That's why I'm trying to translate the texts in Les Epicuriens that I haven't been able to find anywhere else. Granted, it's like reading a description of the reflection of the Moon in the pond through sunglasses (fancy designer French sunglasses) but it's all I got 😎