

What holds me back from embracing EP

Post by "Cassius" of March 1, 2022 at 3:39 PM

[Quote from EricR](#)

Is it accepted within the community that it's an indisputable fact that "there is nothing other than atoms and void", or is it thought to be a belief that may or may not be true or provable?

This is as much an epistemological question as physical.

Based on the thread so far (and a short private exchange with Eric) I am pretty sure that a large part of what Eric is asking is the "epistemology" issue - the "certainty" issue.

Was Epicurus teaching a set of facts, or methodology, or combination of the two, by which we should be darn-near "certain" that nothing exists except the "material" realm?

Sometimes we get sidetracked on the question of "the physics has changed" and we start talking about fields and energy and the qualities of "nothingness" and the like, but I think we're now pretty on track that the essential question here is something else:

I don't know if this question will finally set us off on a thorough discussion of Philodemus' "On Signs / On Methods of Inference" (because everyone knows that whenever I have a question I consult Philodemus!) but I am pretty sure that the issues contained there and in [PD22](#) - [PD25](#) are what we need to discuss - with the emphasis being on Philodemus, and the help that is provided by the DeLacy commentary in his translation.

Ultimately one version of the question is: "Do we ever know that we have enough evidence to be "certain" of something? And, if so, "How do we know that we have reached that point?"

This is pretty much the question [where Frances Wright decided to "punt" and take the position that we should take issues like this and classify them as "unanswerable" and/or "not my concern."](#) I will go on record immediately and say that I think she was very wrong to do that. In fact that's my best guess as to why she decided not to spend much effort on Epicurus for the rest of her life, and I think that was a tragic mistake.

So maybe another question that we will answer when we answer Eric is "How do we avoid "the Frances Wright problem?" And that means that part of this debate ought to include a look at [Wright's statements in Chapter 15](#) where she concludes: "Above all, she advances no dogmas, — is slow to assert what is, — and calls nothing impossible." (That "she" in the quote is a reference to "Real Philosophy" personified as "she.")

Can you imagine hearing Epicurus say "I can't say that it's impossible that the universe was created by a supernatural god?" I can't, and in regard to the AFDIA book review these are the issues where we need to point out that Wright was deviating from Epicurus.

Wright will help us make the issue clear, but we won't find the answer there. I think we'll find it in Philodemus, Lucretius, and [Epicurus' letter to Herodotus](#), with a little help from Diogenes Laertius, Diogenes of Oinoanda, and even Sextus Empiricus.

If we could just inspire someone to become the "Epistemologist" of our little garden, and help systematize this issue in the way that Nate has done the PDs or Don has done Menoecus or Joshua has attacked reading Torquatus, we would REALLY accomplish something!