

A Challenge To Epicurean Thinking Grounded in Epistemology and Physics

Post by "Cassius" of March 14, 2022 at 3:49 PM

You may not be one of them, and I grant that some aren't, but I truly believe that is a small minority of people, and under pressure, that number shrinks even more dramatically.

I think that Epicurus was attempting to deal with EXACTLY what you are raising here, and I think he thought that we could do very much better than had been done previously - and I would say since then too - to explain this issue and provide an answer to people of relatively normal intelligence.

Yes it does require some degree of brainpower and experience "to be able to figure the problem out" (a phrase in one of the PD's or fragments) but I think that's exactly what Epicurus was working on, and I frankly think that it constitutes probably the most important part of his project both then and now for us today.

Yes Epicurus was good with observations, and good with coming up with logical deductions, but this issue of "how to think" constitutes pretty much the ultimate challenge where religion beats (or nihilism) beats us back again and again.

We can do much better than we've done already to reconstruct Epicurus' work in this area.

Quote

I'll get our podcast from yesterday up as soon as I can while these issues are fresh in our minds, because I think we're talking about exactly the point introduced in Herodotus as:

[38] For this purpose it is essential that the first mental image associated with each word should be regarded, and that there should be no need of explanation, if we are really to have a standard to which to refer a problem of investigation or reflection or a mental inference. And besides we must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with the feelings existing in us, in order that we may have indications whereby we may judge both the problem of sense perception and the unseen. Having made these points clear, we must now consider things imperceptible to the senses.

It's when we turn to "things imperceptible to the senses" that we need to observe his process of reasoning and use that to explain statements such as [PD22-25](#). Right now we largely skip over

them fairly superficially, but it's likely Epicurus thought they were key to unwinding exactly what we are asking.

[PD22](#). We must consider both the real purpose, and all the evidence of direct perception, to which we always refer the conclusions of opinion; otherwise, all will be full of doubt and confusion.

[PD23](#). If you fight against all sensations, you will have no standard by which to judge even those of them which you say are false.

[PD24](#). If you reject any single sensation, and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion, as to the appearance awaiting confirmation, and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations, as well, with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong.

[PD25](#). If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles.