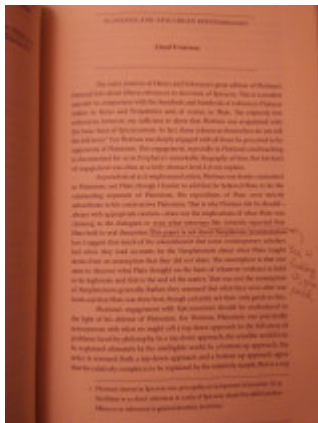


Plotinus and Epicurean Epistemology by Lloyd P. Gerson

Post by "Eikadistes" of October 15, 2022 at 12:43 PM

I am currently reading *Epicurus: His Continuing Influence and Contemporary Relevance* edited by Dane R. Gordon and David B. Suits. It contains a collection of essays that address a variety of Epicurean topics. Most of the essays have been informative and enjoyable. However, as I read (rather, as I **trudged** through) Lloyd Gerson's essay "Plotinus and Epicurean Epistemology", I was reminded that Idealistic philosophy is not only incapable of providing us with tools we can use to improve our lives, but that a celebrated translator, *himself*, is (as I concluded) unable to present the obfuscating philosophy in a digestible format. Lloyd Gerson specializes in metaphysics and Neo-platonism, and is a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, best known for his translation of Plotinus' *Enneads*. I have included a picture below that summarizes my response to the 12-page essay:



Quote

"But in a top down approach, the relatively simple is identified with the intelligible, whereas in a bottom up approach the relatively simple is identified with the sensible. The top down approach identifies the relatively simple with the intelligible principles, soul, intellect, and the intelligible Forms, and ultimately, the One; the bottom up approach identifies the relatively simple with elements of some sort of the intelligible as in some way epiphenomenal or supervenient on the sensible. [...] That is, the confirming or 'witnessing' evidence adduced by Epicurus is unable to turn belief into true belief that is not merely accidentally true because there is nothing added to the original presentation that entails the truth of the belief. There is no belief that o , which added to the belief that p , entails q . [...] The second presupposition is that knowledge is essentially or primarily occurrent and self-reflexive. That is, ' s knows p ' if and only if ' s

knows that s knows p'. In the latter formulation, 's' must, of course, stand for the identical subject in both places if there is to be genuine self-reflexivity. [...] The former [possessing knowledge] is the dispositional state; the latter [having knowledge] is the occurrent state. In the occurrent state, one is in a mental state, namely, identity with the object of knowledge, and simultaneously aware that one is in that state. [...] All one could conceivably have is one putative state of knowing, call it 'A' and another putative state of being aware that the entity is in state 'A'. Call the second state 'B'. But 'A' and 'B' cannot be states of the identical subject. The easiest case is to make 'A' a switch in the 'on' position. Then 'B' must be another switch in, say, the 'on' position. But the subjects of each switch obviously cannot be identical. The first switch cannot both be in the 'on' and 'off' positions nor can it be 'twice' in the 'on' position. So, in addition to the problem about how there could be self-reflexivity in the material entity, there could be no infallibility either because there is no way to guarantee that 'B' will always correctly monitor the state 'A'. Thus, to put it simply, the fact that B 'reports' that 'A' is in the 'on' position does not entail that 'A' is truly in that position." (Plotinus and Epicurean Epistemology, 69-75)

By ZEUS that was a frustrating read. (Neo-)Platonists require the invention of an utterly abstract lexicon to even *begin* to explain their ideas. I can see how Christian churches were so willing to adopt this disconnected mysticism to justify their supernatural propositions.

What is the *point* of this philosophy? Has it *ever* helped *anyone* do *anything*?