

Keen Reasoning Based on the Evidence of the Senses

Post by "Cassius" of November 29, 2022 at 9:42 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I suppose you could state that out of the gate then give reasons for it.

Yes I think that's generally the best way. Try to make a clear statement, and then explain it, rather than go from question to question to question as Socrates does in the Platonic dialogues.

I think partly I am analyzing this as a lawyer, where the rules of court generally are that the judge will sometimes tell the witness (when the question is appropriate) to "Answer yes or no, and then you can explain your answer...."

And partly I am trying to analyze this from an "ordinary person" standard, which is where we generally want to be proficient in talking (as opposed to talking within professional philosophy settings). We can't help normal people if they can't understand what we are talking about.

It's not a question of being more or less accurate, because it's possible to state the issue in understandable terms, as Lucretius does in Book 4. Or as Diogenes of Oinoanda does when he says that we admit that there is a flux, but it is no so fast that we are not able to comprehend it. Maybe the issue is one of "rhetoric" but that's another example of a word which has connotations that have overcome the word's usefulness.

It's certainly possible to debate the question of knowledge into oblivion, but I think Epicurus has his finger on a very practical problem. The "priests" succeed in their manipulations in many cases precisely because they have convinced normal people that the questions and answers are too complicated for them to understand. The only way out of that box is to begin to unwind the issues involved in what "understanding" is in the first place so that people can "resist the threats of the priests."

Quote from Diogenes of Oinoanda

Fr. 5

[Others do not] explicitly [stigmatise] natural science as unnecessary, being ashamed to acknowledge [this], but use another means of discarding it. For, when they assert that things are inapprehensible, what else are they saying than that there is no need for us to pursue natural science? After all, who will choose to seek what he can never

find?

Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.

I've always liked this phrase in particular: "After all, who will choose to seek what he can never find?"

The goal of the priests is to discourage people from even questioning them, and they succeed when they convince people that no answers and no knowledge is even possible. If you can never know anything, never be sure of anything, never be certain of anything - then why bother questioning authority in the first place?