

# "Epicurean Philosophy: An Introduction from the 'Garden of Athens'" edited by Christos Yapijakis

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2023 at 3:41 PM

Also from the article Don cited, it is interesting to see Sedley disagree so strongly with Bailey's interpretations. This kind of disagreement leads me to conclude that while I am not ready to die on the hill of whether there were only three or actually four criterion of truth, the real issue is the deeper question of making sure that the criterion come to us "naturally" and "without opinion" and can therefore serve as data which Nature programs us to accept as a given. That's the problem with most versions I see that attempt to describe a "fourth" leg. Like Don is saying, suggestions as to a fourth seem to be describing a process of evaluation, not a mechanism for receiving raw unfiltered data.

To me the danger zone is anytime you cross that line into thinking that something you have developed in your own mind, after evaluation, has to be taken with the kind of acceptance you grant to what you see or hear or touch. I've always read Bailey as indicating that he thinks that conceptions which we develop in our minds can serve as a criterion of truth, and in fairness to him Diogenes Laertius can be read that way.

But I think it's beyond dispute that Epicurus was looking to develop a theory of the tools which Nature gave to us by which to evaluate our conclusions. If so, questions like whether "images" fit within the canon, and whether the canon has three or four or fourteen legs, are not nearly as important as avoiding considering our own thoughts as criteria of truth. But Nature does not give us full-blown conceptions either at birth or at anytime later, at least under any interpretation of Epicurus that I can find to be reasonable.

Considering our own conclusions to be criteria of "truth" seems to me very much like what Plato was doing in suggesting that our minds can make contact with ideal forms. And if you get to that point of agreeing with Plato there, then you get to the point (which we regrettably left out of our most recent podcast) that Plato could hold that you could never really know whether the thing in front of you is a horse, but that you *can* know the ideal form of "horseness."

That Platonic position is at the very least impractical, if not in fact total nonsense.

error.<sup>139</sup>

13 In our text, this ‘empirical’ thought is distinguished from ‘theoretical’ thought about invisible entities (especially in 13 VIII 5-3 inf.); is characterised as thought about particulars by contrast with inductive thought about universals (13 X 9 inf. ff.); and is included in a list of all the chief thought-processes recognised by Epicurus (13 VI 1 inf. ff.). It is antithetical to all abstract forms of thought.<sup>140</sup>

by w- ue ro lis id- u- in- ey pi- ng ad ai is ry ts so ης se e- id se  
Bailey<sup>141</sup> argues that an ἐπιβολή τῆς διανοίας can be used to apprehend not only the objects of perception, but also scientific concepts. This is done, he suggests, by juxtaposing already established facts about atoms and void and then ‘intuitively’ drawing from them an inescapable conclusion. The ἐπιβολή τῆς διανοίας is thus the ultimate criterion in the investigation of the invisible.

If there were any truth in this account, it would be fatal to my explanation of ἐπιβλητικός as ‘empirical’; but fortunately there is none. Bailey bases himself chiefly on the section of the *Letter to Herodotus*<sup>142</sup> in which the motion of atoms in a moving body is discussed. A distinction is made between the ‘smallest period of continuous time’ and ‘periods of time imaginable in thought’,<sup>143</sup> and we are told that although within the former kind of time-unit the atoms in a moving body move in one direction, within the latter kind they move in all directions, but bounce off each other at such a high rate as to give the visual impression of moving in one only. He adds the explanation: ‘τὸ γὰρ προσδοξαζόμενον περὶ τοῦ ἀοράτου, ὡς ἄρα καὶ οἱ διὰ λόγου θεωρητοὶ χρόνοι τὸ συνεχές τῆς φορᾶς ἔξουσιν, οὐκ ἀληθές ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῶν τοιούτων· ἐπεὶ τό γε θεωρούμενον πᾶν ἢ κατ’ ἐπιβολὴν λαμβανόμενον τῇ διανοίᾳ ἀληθές ἐστὶν’. Bailey’s interpretation of this final phrase (‘ἐπεὶ ...’) is that ‘τὸ... θεωρούμενον’ alludes back to the observed fact that in a continuous period of time the parts of a moving body move in one direction only, and that ‘κατ’ ἐπιβολὴν λαμβανόμενον τῇ διανοίᾳ’ refers to the correct discovery that this same rule does not apply in an atomic period of time. Thus he makes these words explanatory not just of the immediately preceding sentence (‘τὸ γὰρ προσδοξαζόμενον .....’), but of two separate points in the whole argument that goes before.

e. n, 6. Any reader will, I believe, testify that the text as it stands cannot be understood in this way. The clause beginning ‘ἐπεὶ ...’ can only be explanatory of the clause that immediately precedes it. Furley<sup>144</sup> comes closest to what I believe to be the correct interpretation of the passage. If what Epicurus has stated about