

Further Thoughts On Science And Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2024 at 11:35 AM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

The leaders in EpicureanFriends have devoted great time to the study of perspectives derived 2000 years ago. So, the question: How does this devotion lead you to life perspectives for today that you could not derive from similar effort to examining the world today?

This is not meant or intended to be a challenge. It is not that at all. Rather, it is a question about how the philosophical frameworks of two millennia ago are the same or different from today.

I'm listening to episode 200 of the podcasts. And, I've gotten "On The Nature of Things". And, I am ready to dive into The Letter to Menoecus. But, before "going down the rabbit hole" I'm wondering if any of you can reflect on this issue of bringing "then" to "now". Thanks to any who wish to jump in. (Joshua You referenced the concept of such application in Episode 200).

BrainToBeing I completely accept that you do not intend this to be a "challenge." However I think the way you are conveying this question indicates something important about the way you are approaching the entire question. Of what necessary relevance is it to the question of whether a particular idea is correct whether it is 2000 years old or 2 minutes old. If you are being frustrated by the lack of connection on your questions and answers, I think the frustration stems in part from that: philosophy does not generally base its view of whether something is correct based on how long the idea has been around.

I grant you in clinical practice times change fast, and one day's scientist is often the next day's quack. But the general definition of "what is a quack" does not change by year.

It appears to me that you have done little reading so far into either the texts themselves or to the well-reasoned commentaries (DeWitt, primarily, in this context, though I would include Austin as well).

You seem to be evaluating solely on the basis of "what is the latest science" which is totally understandable for a clinician, but is not "philosophy."

If I am in a car accident and I need surgery for broken bones, then I want the best clinician with the latest medical information that I can find.

But if I am suffering from an existential crisis of anxiety over whether I am going to hell when I die or whether a supernatural god will punish me for being "evil" or whether there are ideal absolutes by which I should live, a "clinician" is going to be of no use whatsoever. Certainly at some times certain people struggle with such issues because they have biological or chemical issues, and a clinician is needed to bring their functioning ability back to "the norm." But in the general cases that we are dealing with, where bodily health issues are not in questions, a clinical approach is never going to answer the questions that we really want to know.

My strong advice is that rather than reading any of the letter or the more specific material, you get into the DeWitt book, and let him introduce you to the full spectrum of issues that Epicurus was addressing. DeWitt is exactly tuned toward addressing the "big picture" that you are looking for so you can accept or reject it.

Epicurus' starting point was that he wanted to understand how the world could have come into being from nothing, and he rejected the idea that his teachers - the "clinicians" of his day - taught him.

You may or may not personally profit from Epicurus' approach, and if you don't need it then I applaud you for being so unaffected by the deeper philosophical issues. But the clinical approach can't resolve these questions for the ordinary man on the street, and the general direction toward addressing them has to come through a philosophy that deals with issues of what "should be" (which Epicurus holds should be based on what "is"), and not on an arbitrary selection of a goal through a clinical approach that never gets to the heart of what "should be" in the first place.

I understand that there are all sorts of ways to frame questions of how to get from what "is" to what "ought to be" in our own lives. Epicurus gives us one coherent approach that we can accept and reject, but in Epicurus' case his opinions being 2000 years old are a feature - because they have stood the test of time - rather than a fault.