

Episode 234 - Cicero's OTNOTG - 09 - Dealing With Marcus Aurelius And The Canonical Basis For the Epicurean View Of Divinity

Post by "Cassius" of June 30, 2024 at 8:08 PM

LR's last question I think points out the problem in making the criteria to be four rather than three. I have always thought that the following arguments on this point, also from Chapter 8, seemed persuasive to me:

The following objections may also occur to the mind of the reader: if the formation of the general concept ensues upon acts of sensation, then all elements of anticipation are removed; again, if it is formed as the residuum of acts of sensation, this is a sort of inductive process and no result of a rational process can itself be a primary criterion of truth, which Epicurus declared the prolepsis to be; still again, if the general concept is the sum of a series of sensations, then the prolepsis is merged with sensation, and the second criterion of Epicurus disappears. This, in turn, would mean that Epicurus possessed no criterion of truth on the abstract levels of thought. Such a conclusion is hardly to be tolerated.

....

Even within Epicurean circles the term prolepsis underwent unjustified extensions. For instance, Epicurus, recognizing Nature as the canon or norm, had asserted that, just as we observe fire to be hot, snow to be cold, and honey to be sweet, so, from the behavior of newborn creatures, we observe pleasure to be the telos or end. Certain of his followers, however, shaken no doubt by Stoic criticism, took the position that the doctrine was an innate idea, that is, a prolepsis.⁴⁸ In strict logic this error was a confusion between quid and quale. The problem was not to decide what could be predicated of the end or telos but what was the identity of the end. Was it pleasure or was it something else?

....

When once these ambiguities and confusions have been discerned and eliminated, it is possible to state the teaching of Epicurus with some of that precision by which he set high store. In the meaning of the Canon, then, a sensation is an aisthesis. All such sensations may possess value; otherwise there would be no sense in saying, "We pay attention to all sensations." Their values, however, range all the way from totality to zero. The value is total only when the sensation is immediate. For example, when Aristotle says, "The sense of sight is not deceived as to color," this is true only of the close view, because colors fade in more distant views.

Sensations, however, usually present themselves in combinations of color, shape, size, smell, and so on. An immediate presentation of such a composite unit is a phantasia. All such presentations are true, but they do not rank as criteria in the meaning of the Canon, for the reason that the intelligence has come into play. An act of recognition (epaisthesis) has taken place in the mind of the observer, which is secondary to the primary reaction that registered color, shape, size, smell, and so forth.

That Epicurus did not regard these composite sensations as criteria is made clear by a statement of his own: "The fidelity of the recognitions guarantees the truth of the sensations."¹⁹ For example, the animal standing yonder is recognized as a dun-colored ox. This is a secondary reaction. Only the primary perceptions of color, shape, size, and so on constitute a direct contact between man and the physical environment. The truth of these perceptions is confirmed by the fidelity of the recognition.

....

Again, let it be assumed that the quality of sweetness is registered by sensation. It is not, however, sensation that says, "This is honey"; a secondary reaction in the form of a recognition involving intelligence has taken place. This, in the terminology of Epicurus, is "a fantastic perception of the intelligence." These were not given the rank of criteria by Epicurus for the reason already cited. It is on record, however, that later Epicureans did so.²⁰