

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

Post by "Little Rocker" of July 1, 2024 at 8:20 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think the entire history of Epicurus is warped almost beyond recognition by trying to interpret him in terms of ideas that he never thought or considered plausible.

Yes, exactly this.

[Quote from Don](#)

On the one hand, it seems to me, we're trying to get a grasp on Epicurus's understanding of the mind and sensations and prolepsis and how he understood thought and memory etc. On the other, I'm trying to shoehorn a 2,000+ year old round peg into a modern neuroscience square hole. The understanding of Epicurus's perspective is interesting, valuable, and worthwhile from a philosophical and historical perspective but I'm skeptical if it's possible to "translate" that perspective and connect it to a modern neuroscience understanding of the brain, perception, sensation, etc....I'm beginning to think it might be better to simply acknowledge that the two frames are irreconcilable, and move on to understanding each (the ancient and modern) separately.

For what it's worth, I tend to have two criteria that guide my efforts to 'figure Epicurus out':

Criterion 1: the text is the chief constraint. If we want to take Epicurus on his own terms, the text itself has to support, or at least not decisively rule out, a viable reading, and I prefer, all things considered, to keep my body of primary text reasonably narrow (as in, what we have from Epicurus, not what Plutarch or Clement of Alexandria say about Epicurus).

Criterion 2: I know this is contentious, but I also think we should seek the most philosophically and empirically charitable account the text can sustain. That means we should rule out interpretations that unnecessarily saddle Epicurus with untenable positions, *if* a more plausible position can be attributed to Epicurus within the bounds of textual evidence. Which is to say I think it's totally fine, Don, to consider whether Epicurus might be in striking distance of what might count as a viable contender of a view today. I think it's always good to ask, 'how close is he to our current understanding?' Even if, in the end, it turns out the answer is, 'nowhere near.'