

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 2, 2024 at 10:05 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Our minds don't seem to grasp eidola from their air to conceive of things.

Say it ain't so, Don! I mean, at least Santa emits eidola, right?! 😊

[Quote from Don](#)

Where do you come down on Cicero? Valuable? Reliable? LOL I find Cicero insufferable as a commentator, but he preserved some pivotal information... but how much to trust him as a conveyor of Epicurean teaching?...Curious also about your view of using the Herculaneum material: Philodemus, the fragments of On Nature, and so on. I'm inclined to make use of it where there is a reasonable amount of intact text, but skeptical of a lot of what might need "reconstruction."

Cicero, though largely hostile, and burdened with the conceit of a talented undergrad, does seem to me to have one redeeming quality—his Academic Skepticism required him to take seriously and weigh competing positions, never fully accepting any of them. And his bestie was an Epicurean. So I generally take his reports of Epicurean views seriously, *unless* it seems to set the Epicureans up for a too easy dismissal by Cicero's subsequent critique or has the vague odor of emblematically Roman interests that Cicero might have picked up from Philodemus. *And unless he's the only one to say something that radically alters a general understanding.*

I take Philodemus with a dose of caution for the reasons you mention—the text is fragmentary, and reconstruction is sometimes guided by the view of the person producing the reconstruction. The use of AI in reconstruction, though, interests me. I'm also a bit wary of Philodemus because he taught Romans, and Romans were a weird lot.

[Quote from Don](#)

I just don't think we'll find exact parallels of prolepseis from a modern understanding... but I remain open to the idea!!

Yeah, I think if Epicurus is a radical empiricist of the sort that many people take him to be, where the mind contributes nothing to 'complete' perception, and more importantly, to the generation and refinement of *prolepseis*, then he had the wrong view. Nothing bad about that because some people still have that view—it's not a settled question. But I think developmental psychology and animal research show that cognitive systems come prepared to structure the key parts of experience using built-in capacities for abstractions, especially those required to navigate the environment. And honestly, given his Cradle Argument and his view that humans, like animals, are hedonists, I suspect Epicurus would privilege the evidence from those experimental fields, even against his own view, if it got him what he wanted in the end.