

Epicureanism and Scientific Debates Epicurean Tradition and its Ancient Reception - New (2023) Collection of Commentaries

Post by "Cassius" of October 31, 2024 at 10:50 AM

In my skimming this work so far, the article I have found most interesting is "The Elaboration of Prolepsis Between Epicurus and The Stoics: A Common Challenge To Innatism?" by Jean-Baptist Gourinat.

The article contains very useful background and a chart comparing uses of prolepsis by Epicurus and the Stoics. He also draws together the evidence that Epicurus and Zeno were not so much at war with each other but that much of the war with the stoics started with Chrysippus.

So far I think he tends to take a different approach than several of us here, in holding (underlined) that "In other words, preconceptions are mental images stored and engraved in the mind, but they also include a conception of what something is, they are the basis for human knowledge and recognition of universal objects, and they are naturally formed in the mind, without being taught."

But regardless of that, he draws a distinction between Diogenes Laertius and Cicero that I think most of us recognize:

Quote

However, there is a difference between the two accounts, since Diogenes Laertius gives examples of preconceptions of natural kinds (i.e., human, horse, or cow) and describes a concept formation that is the result of sense-perception and memory. Cicero by contrast does not refer to the preconceptions of natural kinds but to the preconceptions of the gods, and he does not say that we form this preconception by perception and memory, but that we have an "inborn" (*insita uel potius innata*) knowledge that nature has "engraved in our minds" (*insculpsit in mentibus*):

quote omitted... then

Quote

Here, Cicero does not explicitly attribute to Epicurus the claim that we are born and come to life with such a preconception of the gods already implanted in our minds at the very moment of our birth. However, he uses such words as *insitus* and *innatus* that point to an innate knowledge, not depending on any sense experience. 41 He also

insists that nature engraves preconceptions in our mind, not memory. And indeed it is clear that, whatever maybe the process of formation of our notions of the gods, they cannot come from repeatedly seeing gods as we see humans, horses, and cows and by memorizing the impressions we have of such natural kinds. Thus with the description given by Cicero, it seems that the preconceptions of the gods is formed quite differently from the empiricist way by which we form a preconception of a cow. It is implanted by nature and does not seem to have an empirical origin. It is not the case in Cicero that the prolepsis is built on memory nor in such a way that “the senses give the lead” (προηγουμένων τῶν αἰσθήσεων). It remains that both kinds of preconceptions are sketches or delineation of things, engraved in the mind and preliminary to enquiry and discussion.