

Episode 262 - He Who Says "Nothing Can Be Known" Knows Nothing

Post by "Don" of January 8, 2025 at 8:51 PM

The case for laying emphasis in the episode on "lower case s 'skepticism' vs upper case s 'Skepticism'" is a good one. *BUT* there's one thing to note about Lucian's *Alexander the Oracle Monger* when the translation says "It was an occasion for a Democritus, nay, for an Epicurus or a Metrodorus[1], perhaps, a man whose intelligence was steeled against such assaults by **scepticism and insight**, one who, if he could not detect the precise imposture, would at any rate have been perfectly certain that, though this escaped him, the whole thing was a lie and an impossibility."

The Greek doesn't use the word for skeptic (σκέψις skepsis, "inquiry") or a similar word. The word used is ἀπιστέω. The whole phrase is:

ἢ καὶ αὐτοῦ Ἐπικούρου (Erikourou) ἢ Μητροδώρου (Metrodorou) ἢ τινος ἄλλου ἀδαμαντίνην πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα τὴν **γνώμην** ἔχοντος, ὡς ἀπιστήσαι καὶ ὄπερ ἦν εἰκάσαι, καὶ εἰ μὴ εὐρεῖν τὸν τρόπον ἐδύνατο, ἐκεῖνο γοῦν προπεπεισμένου, ὅτι λέληθεν αὐτὸν ὁ τρόπος τῆς μαγγανείας, τὸ δ' οὖν πᾶν ψεῦδος ἐστὶ καὶ γενέσθαι ἀδύνατον.

The key words are:

- ἀδαμαντίνην (adamantinen) = adamantine, of steel
 - For those of you who are Marvel superhero fans, yes, that's like Wolverine's adamantium skeleton. So Epicurus and Metrodorus aren't simply "steeled" they have knowledge like adamantium 😊
- γνώμην (gnomen) = knowledge, intelligence, judgement
- ἀφροσύνη (aphroσύνη) = disbelieve, distrust; doubt; to be incredulous

PS. I want to add (to be clear) that the skeptic/Skeptic distinction is valid and an important one due to the idiosyncrasies of English. Lower case skeptical is a decent translation of ἀφροσύνη, but looking at the ancient Greek itself - from my perspective - always provides additional nuance.