

"Faith" And Confidence In Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Cassius" of August 27, 2025 at 3:24 PM

This is definitely a tricky issue to navigate. I would think it really implicates issues of canonicity and what Philodemus would be talking about in "On Signs/Methods of Inference." When is it appropriate to extrapolate from the known to reach conclusions about the unknown?

It's tempting to think of rationality as requiring direct evidence, but it's also common (in law for example) to reach conclusions based on "circumstantial evidence." We wouldn't normally refer to that as having "faith" or "trust" in something, but I suppose that's exactly what we're doing in trusting that the "circumstances" can indicate a reliable conclusion.

It really grates on the sensibilities to consider "Faith" to be an Epicurean virtue or a good thing at all, but I suppose it is and it's something to get used to discussing as part of the proper attitude toward Epicurean canonicity.

"Trust" or "Faith" implies an object which we are trusting or having faith in. As a general term in an Epicurean context, what would be that object? Here again maybe "Confidence" works just as well or better, and indicates where Cicero got that derogatory accusation in "On The Nature of the Gods":

Quote from On The Nature of The Gods Book One - VIII¶ (Yonge version)

After this, Velleius, with the confidence peculiar to his sect, dreading nothing so much as to seem to doubt of anything, began as if he had just then descended from the council of the Gods, and Epicurus's intervals of worlds. Do not attend, says he, to these idle and imaginary tales; nor to the operator and builder of the World, the God of Plato's Timæus; nor to the old prophetic dame, the Πρόνοια of the Stoics, which the Latins call Providence; nor to that round, that burning, revolving deity, the World, endowed with sense and understanding; the prodigies and wonders, not of inquisitive philosophers, but of dreamers!

Looks like the Latin is: "Tum Velleius fidenter sane, ut solent isti, nihil tam vereus quam ne dubitare aliqua de re videretur....."