

How Should We Evaluate Abstractions?

Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2025 at 9:58 PM

One of our recent participants asked me about this topic and it well deserves a thread. I recall in our podcast years ago that I consciously pulled back from some earlier statements that were probably too sweeping in viewing abstractions negatively. My current view is that it's certainly not abstractions as a concept that are across-the-board suspect, but those abstractions which are formed without any connection to evidence from the senses, anticipations, and feelings. But we can probably do a lot better than that than clarifying a proper Epicurean attitude toward classes of abstractions.

Here's the question that was presented:

I'm interested in how we can determine whether a given abstraction is useful or not. For example, mathematics cannot be understood through the senses. It is abstract in a sense, but it is helpful in describing the world. I'm interested in the criteria for considering given abstractions valuable or not.

Anyone have thoughts to add to the conversation?