

PD24 - Commentary and Translation of PD 24

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2026 at 7:44 AM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

In your response to me, you quoted Thos. Jefferson; is he the modern philosopher you referred to and I asked about? I must not understand your train of thought. I was thinking perhaps you were referring to 20th century philosophers as being somehow out in left field.

I am definitely considering Jefferson, who embraced Epicurus in my view very accurately, as correct in most all of his statements on these issues. I have the most relevant of his statements relating to Epicurus here: <https://newepicurean.com/jefferson/>

And in general it's fair to say that I am speaking against the more modern philosophers, who seem in most cases to be in agreement with Socrates that nothing is really "knowable."

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Your referral to radical skeptics, has me confused again. Am I wrong to conclude that in your use of those two words, radical skeptics mean the philosophers of ancient Greece BCE? With respect, you seem to have a bone to pick with the skeptics of old and their influence on some. I believe I understand the battle of ideas between the school of Epicurus and the Skeptics with a capital S.

"radical skeptics" is a term I use to describe anyone who claims that no knowledge of any kind is possible. This would include Socrates, although Socrates apparently was content with the contradiction that he was confident that he knew nothing. This does NOT include all Greek philosophers BCE, as some taught specific doctrines. Yes it's bad to be wrong, as many of them were in arguing things like it is impossible to walk across a room, but worse than being wrong is to take the position that it is impossible ever to be right about anything. As long as you have a standard to declare something to be "right," then you eventually have hope of being right. If you say that it's impossible to be "right" about anything, then you are in the position of the skeptics who Diogenes of Oinoanda criticized when saying that no one will ever seek the truth if they consider it impossible to find.

In general I agree that it is useful to distinguish the worst of the Skeptics with a capital "S", but unfortunately it's not sufficient to do that in many cases because the depth of this problem is not recognized in general conversation. Many people tend to think that ALL skepticism is "good" just like they think ALL dogmatism is "bad," because they aren't familiar with the depth of the issue.

We tend to attract here - as is our goal - people with an interest in philosophy but not deep training in it, and this becomes one of the most important initial questions to cover, which is why it's a constant topic of conversation,

[Quote from DaveT](#)

However, I'm not clear if you are referring to ancient Skepticism that has at best only a remote similarity to the modern scientific methods of finding truth only after experimental testing of any concepts of any nature until there is a consensus to rule-out or rule-in unproven opinion.

The "until there is a consensus" illustrates the problem of generic references to "modern science" and "the scientific method" and "experts" as if using those phrases actually means anything final. There are only particular experts and scientists and particular assertions of results using any method at any time. Consensus is not a logical goal, especially in ethics, and often is later decided to be wrong.

The Epicurean viewpoint was never the "consensus" view in the ancient world, and it will never be in the future. Yet it in my view it held and holds the correct answers as to the absence of (1) supernatural forces (2) life after death, (3) absolute standards of virtue. It also presents a practical and logical approach to having confidence in the best way to live in the absence of those fictions. Therefore Epicurus makes many statements to the effect that he prefers to speak and teach correctly rather than to be concerned about the praise and acceptance of the crowd.

The short answer is that I think Epicurus was all in favor of a generic attitude of questioning claims of authority, especially when those claims do not rest on evidence observable to the senses. But Epicurus was strongly against the conclusion that confidence in any conclusion is impossible. Epicurus makes conclusion after conclusion about many topics, but he never takes "because I or he or she said so" as a reasonable basis for those conclusions.