

Discussion of the Society of Epicurus' 20 Tenets of 12/21/19

Post by "Cassius" of December 28, 2019 at 7:40 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

I am uncertain about Philodemus' accuracy in representing Epicurus.

I am going to comment on several of the above posts but this comment I want to highlight. I agree that skepticism toward Philodemus is warranted for a number of reasons, but there is one reason that I want to highlight, and that is: Many of his works are in such a bad condition that much of what we are reading as the work of "Philodemus" is often little more than informed speculation based on reconstruction of words and passages so much out of contact that it is hardly possible sometimes to tell whether Philodemus is talking about Epicurean positions or "enemy" positions.

(And that's especially a problem because it's normal in a philosophical writing to quote the position you are attacking before you attack it. What if the part that survives is the quote from the position being attacked?)

And that fragmentary and out-of-context state means that scholars -- in many cases very contemporary scholars who have drunk deep from the Stoic-friendly interpretations of Philodemus - are making speculative reconstructions of what they *expect* Philodemus to have been saying, when what they "expect" is not what an ancient Epicurean would really have written.

I think some very valuable information can be gleaned from what we have on Philodemus, but it has to be done very carefully, and I agree with Elayne that I do not trust anything that we have from Philodemus that would carry any implication that cannot also be supported from Lucretius, Diogenes of Oinoanda, or other more faithful and less fragmentary sources.