

References to Epicurus' Attitude Toward The "Place of the Sciences And Liberal Arts"

Post by "Cassius" of July 17, 2020 at 8:14 PM

Yes please post your thoughts Don. When I was editing today I realized that I did a very poor job of digging in to this issue, and that is why in the notes for Episode 28 I am going to go back to the basics of the epistemology before we go further. This is a subject that needs to be very clear so that there is no hint that any advance in science would or could conflict with Epicurean theory - unless that "science" supposedly came up with something supernatural, and that would be unacceptable because it would violate the position that is set by the anticipations that true gods are totally self-sufficient and not involved in such mundane affairs

This is an example of the "tension" between the observational side and the logical side. I personally differ a little with those who think there is a tension, because I do not believe Epicurus saw it that way, because he would say that his logical positions were ALWAYS tied back to observation. And that is what I should have hit home in Episode 27 - ultimately the issue on the size of the atom being limited in size is tied to OBSERVATION - we have never seen a visible object that is undividable, rather than resting purely on logic.

But then there is the question of "well there are a lot of things we haven't seen" and how do we deal with those questions. Ultimately those are issues which need development through study of Philodemus' "On Methods of Inference" and there is always going to be the "logical" question of whether it makes sense to entertain the idea that the conclusions we derive from observation should ever be suspended just on the "possibility" (which is without observed evidence) that something different "could" exist elsewhere. That is a very thorny question but I am solidly convinced that Epicurus would say that it is NOT logical to accept that observed rules "could" be violated just on pure speculation without a shred of evidence. That may get uncomfortably close to "faith" for some people (and therefore I think we see part of the reason DeWitt was willing to "go there") but ultimately I do think it rests on sound reasoning.