

Epicurus On Truth And Falsehood: Statements by Sextus Empiricus / Article By Brown

Post by "Cassius" of July 20, 2020 at 1:09 PM

I am not confident that we should rely either on this writer or on Sextus Empiricus for a correct interpretation of Epicurus' views on "truth," but the material collected here is certainly something to consider, especially the paragraph where Sextus Empiricus is allegedly attempting to describe Epicurus' view on the subject. Full PDF is attached but I have clipped what appear to be the most relevant quotes. Most of the rest of the article is very complex speculation on the part of Bown.



Τὸ δὲ Ἐπικουροῦς τὰ μὲν αἰσθητὰ πάντα εἶπεν ἀληθῆ καὶ ὄντα, τὰ δὲ φησὶ γὰρ ἀληθῆ εἶναι τὰ λεγόμενα ἢ ὁμολογούμενα καὶ ἀπογνόμενα πᾶσι καὶ ψεῦδῶς ἔσθαι φησὶν ἀληθῆ τὰ οὐκ ὄντα ἢ ἄληθῆ ἔσθαι, καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἔσθαι φησὶν τὸ οὐκ ὄντως ἔσθαι ἢ ἄληθῆ ἔσθαι, τὴν τε αἰσθητὴν ἀντιληπτοῦν εἶναι τὸν ἀποπειρατόν αἰσθητῶν, καὶ μὴτε ἀφαρτοῦν τι μὴτε προστιθέσθαι μὴτε μεταστέλλειν τὸν λόγον εἶναι, θεὰ πιστῆς τε ἀληθείας καὶ οὐκ ἐν λαβόμενον ὡς εἴη φύσεως αὐτῆ ἐστίν. οὐκ ἔστι δὲ τὸν αἰσθητῶν ἀληθῶν ὄντων, τὰ θεωρητὰ διαφύκειν καὶ τὰ μὲν αἰσθητὰ εἶναι ἀληθῆ τὰ δὲ ψεῦδη, καθὼς πρότερον εἰρήξαμεν.

And Epicurus spoke of all perceptibles as true and as beings. For it made no difference to say that something is true or that it exists. After that he also gave an outline of truth and falsehood: 'True,' he says, 'is that which is as it is said to be,' and 'False,' he says, 'is that which is not as it is said to be.' And [sc. he says that] perception, being able to apprehend the things which are subjected to it, and neither subtracting, nor adding, nor changing anything—because it is non-rational—both is in all cases truthful and grasps that which is just as that very thing is in its nature. But [sc. he says that] while all perceptibles are true, judgements are different in that some of them are true and others false, as we showed earlier.

Sextus first reports the basic position: Epicurus thinks that all perceptibles are true and that they are beings. (The question whether perceptibles are beings is relevant because several philosophers are reported earlier in the survey to claim that perceptibles have an inferior ontological status and for this reason

More explicit commitments to the view are found elsewhere. While dismissing Epicurus' arguments for the truth-as-correctness of perceptions in his summary of the *Canon*, Diogenes Laertius writes, "And the fact that the objects of perception exist guarantees the truth of perceptions."⁵⁷ Presumably, the

⁵⁵ In the course of this discussion, the Epicureans seem to have insisted that a future-tensed statement that is true-as-correct now is so in virtue of features of the present state of the world, rather than in virtue of the features of some future state of the world. I discuss their views in some detail in *How Epicureans*—in that discussion, however, I remain neutral with regard to the precise nature of these worldly features.

⁵⁶ Cf. *De sensu* 110–11; *De natura rerum* 117–118; *De divinatione* 117–118. I treat the *De divinatione* as 'subject of perception' on the model of *De divinatione*, which clearly has this meaning in *De divinatione* 117, for example. Cf. *De divinatione* 117, 118; *De divinatione* 117–118. The meaning given by 117–118 would make poor sense of the sentence as a whole, but for a different view, see Long and Sedley 474, 4, B.

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'objects of perception' (*ta dianoiteta*) are the same predicative complements elsewhere called 'perceptibles' since their existence is regarded as sufficient for the truth-as-correctness of the corresponding perceptions.⁵⁸ Here, then, Diogenes quite clearly reports that it is the existence of predicative complements that guarantees the truth-as-correctness of the corresponding perceptions; this can be taken as an explicit assertion that the former is responsible for the latter.

This post comes about, and is related to, this discussion here: [References to Epicurus' Attitude Toward The "Place of the Sciences And Liberal Arts"](https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1632-epicurus-on-truth-and-falsehood-statements-by-sextus-empiricus-article-by-brown/?postID=8285#post8285)