

PD24 - Commentary and Translation of PD 24

Post by “Don” of September 2, 2020 at 11:56 PM

Principal Doctrine 24 (PD 24) is one of the more convoluted doctrines with multiple phrases and conjunctions. I would like to provide some commentary and break the doctrine down into manageable words and phrases for everyone to get a more coherent understanding of what Epicurus was communicating. You may also want to take a look at [this doctrine’s page on the Epicurus Wiki](#):

First the original text:

Quote

Εἰ τιν’ ἐκβαλεῖς ἀπλῶς αἴσθησιν καὶ μὴ διαιρήσεις τὸ δοξαζόμενον καὶ τὸ προσμένον καὶ τὸ παρὸν ἤδη κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν καὶ τὰ πάθη καὶ πᾶσαν φανταστικὴν ἐπιβολὴν τῆς διανοίας, συνταράξεις καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς αἰσθήσεις τῆ ματαίῳ δόξῃ, ὥστε τὸ κριτήριον ἅπαν ἐκβαλεῖς. εἰ δὲ βεβαιώσεις καὶ τὸ προσμένον ἅπαν ἐν ταῖς δοξαστικαῖς ἐννοίαις καὶ τὸ μὴ τὴν ἐπιμαρτύρησιν, οὐκ ἐκλείψει τὸ διεψευσμένον· ὥστ’ ἀνηρηκῶς ἔση πᾶσαν ἀμφισβήτησιν καὶ πᾶσαν κρίσιν τοῦ ὀρθῶς ἢ μὴ ὀρθῶς.

Now, let’s break it down before we put it all back together. I’ll provide a (mostly) literal translation then provide commentary. “Phrases or words in quotes” will be followed by [their corresponding original text in brackets to allow you to follow along.]

Quote

Εἰ τιν’ ἐκβαλεῖς ἀπλῶς αἴσθησιν...

Literal: “If” [Εἰ] you throw away “a single perception of the senses” [ἀπλῶς αἴσθησιν]...

Note that **ἐκβαλεῖς** is also the same word used later in the doctrine (...**ὥστε τὸ κριτήριον ἅπαν ἐκβαλεῖς.**) So, we should be sure to use the same word in our final translation in each location! The word **ἐκβαλεῖς** literally means “to cast, hurl, or throw away from yourself.” So, think about this as one literally “throwing away” or “discarding” the information you are getting from one of your sensations here. Note also that **αἴσθησιν** *aisthēsin* is the same word used when explaining the components of The Canon, the criteria of truth. More on this below.

Quote

...καὶ μὴ διαιρήσεις τὸ δοξαζόμενον κατὰ τὸ προσμένον καὶ τὸ παρὸν ἤδη...

Literal: ...and “you do not distinguish” [μὴ διαιρήσεις] between “the holding of an opinion or belief” [τὸ δοξαζόμενον] which is awaiting (confirmation) and what is present “now” [ἤδη]...

τὸ προσμένον gives the sense of waiting on something. It also can be used in the sense of “to wait for one in battle, i.e., to stand one’s ground against.”

Quote

...κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν καὶ τὰ πάθη καὶ πᾶσαν φανταστικὴν ἐπιβολὴν τῆς διανοίας,...

Literal: ...in accordance with perception of the senses, feeling, and true perceptions of the mind...

There’s a LOT to unpack here! First, I want to call your attention to that list of items:

- τὴν αἴσθησιν *tēn aisthēsin* “perception of the senses”
- καὶ τὰ πάθη *kai ta pathē* “and feeling (i.e., pleasure or pain)”
- καὶ πᾶσαν φανταστικὴν ἐπιβολὴν τῆς διανοίας *kai pasan phantastikē epibolēn tēs dianoias* “and every true perception of the mind”

The description of the Canon, the criteria of truth, as outlined in Diogenes Laertius’s biography of Epicurus, contains the same list of items:

DL X.31: “Now in The Canon, Epicurus affirms that our “perceptions of the senses” [τὰς αἰσθήσεις] and preconceptions [προλήψεις] and our “feelings” [τὰ πάθη] are the standards of truth; the Epicureans generally make “perceptions of mental presentations” [τὰς φανταστικὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας] to be also standards.”

So, what is being communicated in this phrase is literally Epicurus’s criteria of truth known as The Canon. I personally find it interesting that this list, either written by Epicurus as an epitome or sanctioned by the Garden as a study tool does not include the prolepses but instead includes the *phantastikē epibolē*. Could the two, in fact, be synonymous? Are the preconceptions identical to the perceptions of the mind? I personally find it better to translate *aisthēsin* as “perception of the senses” to contrast it with the *phantastikē epibolē* “perceptions of the mind.” Both are perceptions with one being tangible (e.g., touch, taste, smell, etc.) and one is intangible (the mind). Norman DeWitt wrote a provocative paper entitled “Epicurus, Περὶ Φαντασίας” where he delved in detail into the *phantastikē epibolē tēs dianoias*. He didn’t make the synonymous claim, that’s me. DeWitt translated the “*phantastikē epibolē tēs dianoias*” “(the incidence of a) true presentation of a single, existent object, though reduced to scale, as it

registers itself upon the vision and mind of a sane, sober, and waking person." In any case, I find it intriguing in how the elements of The Canon are presented here in PD 24.

Quote

...συνταράξεις καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς αἰσθήσεις τῆ ματαίῳ δόξῃ,...

Literal: ...and "you will throw into confusion" [συνταράξεις] the remaining perceptions of the senses for a "groundless and empty belief" [ματαίῳ δόξῃ]...

This first word here, our verb - "syntaraxeis" [*you will throw into confusion*] - begins with **συν-**syn- which has the sense of "together, with..." and gives this verb the idea of throwing everything all together into confusion as well as to disturb or trouble. Consider this has a similar root to **ataraxia** "not disturbed or troubled."

The **λοιπὰς αἰσθήσεις** are the "remaining sensations, the rest of the senses" which are the others which you didn't throw away: Remember our first line. Compare **δόξη** doxe "belief" also occurs in the word encountered earlier: **δοξαζόμενον** doxazomenon "to hold an opinion or belief." A **ματαίῳ δόξῃ** is one that is groundless, vain, futile, empty, one with nothing to support it, more of an opinion than a true belief.

Quote

...ὥστε τὸ κριτήριον ἅπαν ἐκβαλεῖς.

Literal: ...thereby you throw away [ἐκβαλεῖς] the "entire" [ἅπαν] "the standard of truth" (κριτήριον "criterion").

And so we come to end of our first sentence! Here we encounter ἐκβαλεῖς from our first line. We'll use "throw away" here as well. The criterion here, literally the Greek word simply transliterated, is The Canon, the standard of truth, which refers back to our list of the components of The Canon earlier.

So, let's see what we have so far:

If you throw away a single perception of the senses AND you do not distinguish between a holding an opinion that awaits confirmation and what is present now in accordance with The Canon of truth (perception of the senses, feeling, and perception of the mind), you will throw all your other perceptions into confusion for a groundless opinion, thereby throwing away the entire Canon of truth.

If we break this up a little more, I think we can paraphrase it as:

Let's say you don't believe one of your senses, you cast it away from yourself. If you do this, you are throwing away the three legs of The Canon (namely, perceptions of the senses, of the mind, and the feelings of pleasure and pain) that must work together. If you don't use them all,

you won't be able to tell the difference between an opinion that awaits confirmation (by the other senses) and what you can sense now in the present moment through The Canon. This is a groundless belief that is going to cause you trouble in correctly perceiving your remaining perceptions.

Well, that's not simpler, but it tries to bring together similar concepts.

Let's tackle the rest:

Quote

εἰ δὲ βεβαιώσεις καὶ τὸ προσμένον ἅπαν ἐν ταῖς δοξαστικαῖς ἐννοίαις...

Literal: Additionally, if you will "affirm as true" [βεβαιώσεις] everything that is waiting confirmation "in the matters of opinion about thinking" [ἐν ταῖς δοξαστικαῖς ἐννοίαις]...

Note that Epicurus talked about beliefs that were awaiting confirmation in the first part of this doctrine. So, here he's saying that "Let's say you affirm as true everything that should be awaiting confirmation by your other legs of The Canon." It sounds like you're putting the cart before the horse. How can you affirm something before you have confirmation?

Quote

...καὶ τὸ μὴ τὴν ἐπιμαρτύρησιν,...

Literal: ...and that which does not need a witness...

Here, the contrast is made with those opinions/beliefs that are awaiting confirmation and those which do not need any witness. So, you're affirming as true BOTH everything that is awaiting confirmation and that which doesn't (i.e., that which is present to you now in accordance with The Canon).

Quote

...οὐκ ἐκλείψει τὸ διεψευσμένον·

Literal: "You will not abandon" [οὐκ ἐκλείψει] "that which is altogether false" [τὸ διεψευσμένον];...

If you do all those things we just mentioned, you will not abandon "that which is altogether false." It's interesting that the verb here - ἐκλείψει ekleipsei - is the same word as English "eclipse" and had similar connotations in the Greek. Consider if you did abandon falsehood, you would blot out the light of falsehood for the light of truth. But, you're still in darkness if you don't come to your senses.

Quote

ὥστ' τετηρηκῶς ἔση πᾶσαν ἀμφισβήτησιν καὶ πᾶσαν κρίσιν τοῦ ὀρθῶς ἢ μὴ ὀρθῶς.

Literal: ...therefore, you will “retain” [τετηρηκῶς] all “doubt” [ἀμφισβήτησιν] and all judgement [κρίσιν] of what is correct and what is not correct.

I've seen one online Greek text that has ἀνηρηκῶς *anerekos* “abolish” instead of τετηρηκῶς *teterekos* “preserve, retain”. This is a CRUCIAL difference, and τετηρηκῶς is in the Oxford Arundel MS 531 manuscript so I'm accepting that as correct. And *teterekos* makes more sense when taken in context of the rest of PD 24. We preserve all doubt and judgement, we are not going to make any judgement either way and we're going to preserve our doubt.

I also think it's interesting and important to note that the same word is used in two places at the end: ὀρθῶς *orthos*. This is the “orthos” in orthodox, orthogonal, orthodontist, etc. I feel it is significant because it also has the sense of “straight” and The Canon we've been referring to is a literal straight-edge, ruler, measuring rod. So, it would be nice to play this up in a translation, but it's not that easy in English. You could say something like “what is and is not on the straight and narrow” but that's pushing it.

So, the last section can be paraphrased:

If you affirm everything as true - both those opinions that await confirmation and those here and now evident to your senses - you will not abandon falsehood and retain all doubt and refrain from any judgement as to what is correct and what is not correct.

So, that “groundless belief” appears to be the unwillingness to take a stand and just accept that everything is true. You can't make a decision! Epicurus seems to be calling us to trust in The Canon as our criteria of truth, to distinguish between what we don't know right now - what's awaiting confirmation - and what is evident to our senses right now in the present moment.

I hope this provides food for thought even if it doesn't clear up the concepts put forward here in PD 24.