

Comment at the Epicurean Philosophy Facebook Group On Pleasure As The Highest Good

Post by "Don" of September 18, 2020 at 8:48 AM

Quote from Cassius

I think that's a very useful dive into the meaning of that section, but I do think there will remain an important distinction between the realities of things, which we detect through the senses, and our opinions about them, which can only be expressed through words, and which will always include the possibility of error mixed in to those opinions. Otherwise there would be little need to have made the point, since he had already in section 37 made the point about the importance of clarity.

It's important to remember that section 34 is Diogenes's commentary *about* the Epicureans, and 37 is Epicurus himself writing to Herodotus. So, when you say "he had already ... made the point..." that's not the case. Epicurus is making the point about clarity of language in 37 for the first time here.

A **VERY** (almost painfully) literal translation of Diogenes's commentary in 34 is:

Quote

τῶν τε ζητήσεων εἶναι τὰς μὲν **περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων**, τὰς δὲ **περὶ ψιλῆν τὴν φωνήν**.

And of inquiries (there) are, on the one hand, those concerning of concrete things; on the other hand, those concerning simple language.

(Note that the second is singular, so I am inclined to translate it singular as in **language, speech**, and not plural as in **words**.)

There two are listed using *μεν...δε...* That's where the "on the one hand... On the other" come in. This is a very common feature of Ancient Greek. If you want to dive a little deeper, [here's a good intro to that online](#).

My conjecture is that Diogenes is setting up a dichotomy of inquiries where Epicurus saw a means to an end. It wasn't inquiries about words, it was inquiries using simple, direct language. The only inquiries about words would be to establish the clear meaning of words so works could be easily understood and not "run on ... ad infinitum." The only way we are going to transmit the truth of our canonical observations and the truth about the nature of things (atoms, void, etc.) is to through the clearest, simplest language possible. Epicurus is saying we don't use

flowery rhetoric or poetry (Sorry, Lucretius) because there's a chance the results of our inquiries would not be understood.