

Epicurean Outlooks on Skepticism

Post by "Cassius" of October 20, 2020 at 2:14 PM

I had a minute to come back to this: I think the reason that defining the term is so important is that there's an "everyday" meaning of the word Skepticism in which it's fair to say that we all should be skeptics, and clearly Epicurus was one too. It's essential that we demand evidence for our conclusions and that we don't accept things on "faith" without evidence. In that ordinary sense of the word skepticism is totally the right approach (speaking loosely there).

But philosophical skepticism that no knowledge of any kind is possible is a very different animal, and it's my understanding that THAT is what philosophers are talking about when they are being precise, and it's pretty easy to see that that position is what Epicurus/Lucretius were aiming their argument quoted above to mean.

So we have here another situation that if we're talking to real people in the real world, "skepticism" means one thing, but to professional philosophers it means something very different, so we have to be clear what we're talking about.

Exactly the same thing goes for "dogmatism." Dogmaticism in general use has awful meanings, but if it is taken philosophically to mean that at least some things can be grasped with enough certainty to consider them "knowable" then Epicurus was certainly a dogmatist.