

"Facts don't care about your feelings."

Post by "Don" of November 6, 2020 at 10:05 AM

I've seen this quote online, and it summarizes my unease with the use of the word "feelings" in the Canon. I know I've brought this up ad nauseum but it's one aspect of Epicureanism that keep rearing its head at me and insists on being addressed before I can swim completely pleasurably in Epicurean waters. I'll be frank. This is the aspect that makes me still eye Aristotle as an alternative. I don't like that, and I still find aspects of Aristotle troubling.

That thread quote is exactly my issue. Saying "feelings" makes me think we're "going with our gut" which I believe leads us down the road to "I feel it's true so it's true." I can't abide by that.

Please talk me off the Aristotelian ledge! Epicurus wasn't saying our feelings determine facts, right? We still gather objective facts about reality through our senses and mental capacity and judge our reaction to it by pleasure and pain. Is that it? Because if it's "going with your gut" and "[truthiness](#)", Aristotle is winking at me over here.

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2020 at 10:53 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus wasn't saying our feelings determine facts, right? We still gather objective facts about reality through our senses and mental capacity and judge our reaction to it by pleasure and pain. Is that it? Because if it's "going with your gut" and "truthiness", Aristotle is winking at me over here.

Of course he wasn't saying that your feelings about the bullet coming at your head will determine how it impacts you. And he wasn't saying that you can force yourself to be "indifferent" about it and thereby escape the effects of it.

The first comment that comes to mind is that you wouldn't be concerned about the argument that the nose determines how something smells and not the eyes or the ears. It seems pretty obvious to accept that these faculties have domains of their own in which they are supreme, and cannot be overridden by the other faculties. In general, how something smells to you can't be changed by showing you pictures of different things or telling you that you should smell it differently.

It seems to me that the point that Epicurus was making was that pleasure and pain are entitled to the same respect as the nose or the eyes. What they tell you is a primary connection between you and reality and there's no second-guessing it. You can tell yourself that you don't find the pin sticking in your finger painful, but if it feels painful it feels painful.

And a second point that he was making is that since there is no god and no absolute reference point to tell you what is worthwhile and what isn't, then pleasure and pain are in fact the only criteria given by Nature to determine what to pursue and what to avoid. But just like the eyes and ears, the sense of pleasure and pain only gives you input about the "now," and it's up to you to use all your faculties plus your intelligence to make a decision on how you want to proceed over time. In fact you might choose to decide that the particular pleasure and pain is so great that you want to make a decision that will permanently alter or even end your life in exchange for a short-term pleasure or avoidance of pain, but in the end the pleasure and pain should remain primary, because in nature those other standards that Aristotle pushes (god, virtue based on what others do,...) are arbitrary assertions with no evidence to establish that they have any reality outside his assertion that they exist.

I can't recall if we've discussed that "facts don't care about your feelings" statement but I have seen it too and I think it does require analysis.

In one sense it is true - the fact of the bullet striking your head will kill you regardless of how you "feel" about it emotionally."

But in another sense it is very wrong, in that your feelings of pleasure and pain are of primary importance to you, and what other people are asserting as "facts" may truly not be of significance to you at all. Where I see that phrase used most often is in political debates where in truth the "fact" being asserted may not be "true" at all, but rather an assertion of a generalization which may not apply directly to the people involved at all.

It looks to me like once again we have another issue of ambiguity of words. What we're really talking about in the canonical analysis is the "feeling of pleasure and pain" which seems to have been reduced to "pleasure" and "pain" in the texts. It seems to me that "feelings" in this context most properly refers to "reactions" as I have seen you discuss yourself. (The word is a variation of "pathe," right?) What Epicurus was really doing was looking for a general word that describes the combination of all types of pleasure and pain in a way that describes "how it moves us" rather than simply subjectively how we might choose to view something at a particular moment.

So here again part of my comment is that what we need to be doing in philosophy is realizing that we aren't talking biology or physiology. We aren't looking for (because it's not possible) a precise medical terminology description of a bodily phenomena. We're looking instead for a series of words that provide an outline description of the general issues involved by which we can organize our thoughts. And we're not doing that in a vacuum, but in a context in which there are competing philosophies and religions that tell us to organize our thoughts in totally

different ways -- ways that it appears to Epicurus are disastrously inconsistent with the true nature of things and the true goal for life set by nature.

So in the end maybe the bottom line is that when considering that maybe Aristotle or Plato or some other philosophy or modern scientific viewpoint is better, it's important to make sure you're not comparing apples to oranges. If you have Covid19 then you need a medical doctor who is familiar with the latest science on what works and what doesn't, and you need a set of medications - not a high-level philosophy of life.

But if you're at one of those many points in life where you can go in different directions and you're wondering what paths to choose and how to avoid errors of all sorts, then you don't need a medical doctor to prescribe you Xanax or tell you that you need glasses or a hearing aid. You need a high-level philosophy of life that is going to address what options you have and give you way to analyze what choices you should conclude to be best for you to take.

It's awfully easy for people who have already committed to another direction to play word games with people who aren't experienced in these issues, and convince people that they (these competing philosophers) have a better idea about which path to take. Words can be very seductive and it's important to be grounded in the nature of reality, but at the same time neither Xanax nor Remdesivir are going to tell you how to live your life. "Feelings" and "divinity" and "truth" and "reality" all have levels of meaning that apply differently in different contexts, and there's no avoiding that. If they DIDN'T have those contextual differences, then Plato and Aristotle would be right -- there would be absolute truth that applies the same to everyone everywhere and in the same way. But an absolute reality that applies to everyone at all times and all places is exactly what they are trying to persuade you of with their ideal forms and essences.

But in contrast to that evidence shows us that the events of life are contextual. "Feelings" are part of that context, but in the end there are also realities that don't depend on how we feel about them, so there's no way around dealing with and understanding the nature of things.

At least that's my first stab at approaching your comments.

Post by “Godfrey” of November 6, 2020 at 4:09 PM

In today's dysfunctional post-truth political realm, "facts" are all about feelings and that's part of the problem. Science, truth and actual facts have been systematically discredited, so that what's left is what you're told and how you feel about it. This is very Platonic and perhaps Aristotlean (I'm not very well versed in Aristotle): that's exactly what the forms, ideal realms and dialectic accomplish by disassociating from objective reality.

In that the Epicurean canon was a response to Plato, it's also a potential solution to today's purposive confusion. The senses, prolepses and feelings, and after these, reason, cover all the bases as to how we determine truth. They are all "corrective" of each other as in the bent oar problem. EP isn't a touchy-feely philosophy but one that uses all of the tools available to us to determine truth and how to live our lives.

Post by “Cassius” of November 6, 2020 at 4:24 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

The senses, prolepses and feelings, and after these, reason, cover all the bases as to how we determine truth. They are all "corrective" of each other as in the bent oar problem. EP isn't a touchy-feely philosophy but one that uses all of the tools available to us to determine truth and how to live our lives.

I think this is what Don is getting at, because people aren't being clear about what is meant by "truth." The debate goes along the lines too of "my truth" vs. "your truth" as if everyone has exactly the same definition of truth, but the reality is that "truth" is a word that has many levels of meaning, and unless you specify what you're talking about it's easy to get tripped up. Same with the "my facts" vs "your facts" debate. The religionists/ Platonists want to imply that all truth and all facts are the same for everyone. The nihilists/radical skeptics want to say that NO ONE has any claim to any truth or facts whatsoever. Epicurus points the way to a reasonable evaluation of what is contextual and what is not contextual, and gives you the tools to deal with the problem of "ought" by referring to the only realistic standard of preference -- the pleasure and pain of the person/people involved in the analysis.

Those distinctions have been wiped away in modern terminology so we're regularly at each others' throats about issues where we not communicating on a basic level.

Just like there is both atoms AND void, there is both contextual truth (some prefer vanilla) and "absolute truth" (all men die).

But if we get caught up on "well there is really no such thing as void because modern science says that there is energy and fields and so talking about void is obsolete" then we are always going to be stuck in the level of the trees and never see the forest.

Post by “Don” of November 6, 2020 at 7:53 PM

I think this is helping. [Cassius](#) , your pointing out about the faculties complementing each other is helpful. [Godfrey](#) , bringing up the bent oar in this context. That helps too!

So, Epicurus says it's alright to use reason, right? We shouldn't rely on it to rationalize and come up with "ideal" absolutes, but we can use it to assimilate the information from our canonical senses.

Am I getting this right? I may be *slowly* leaving the Aristotelian ledge and coming in through the Epicurean window.

Any additional insights are welcomed!!

Post by “Godfrey” of November 6, 2020 at 8:23 PM

Quote

So, Epicurus says it's alright to use reason, right? We shouldn't rely on it to rationalize and come up with "ideal" absolutes, but we can use it to assimilate the information from our canonical senses.

Exactly! Reason is a tool, but it's not reliable without reference to the faculties of the canon.

Post by “Cassius” of November 6, 2020 at 9:07 PM

Godfrey's response is in my view 100% correct, but in addition:

[Quote from Don](#)

So, Epicurus says it's alright to use reason, right? We shouldn't rely on it to rationalize and come up with "ideal" absolutes, but we can use it to assimilate the information from our canonical senses.

Oh My Gosh Yes!!!! What other reading can be given to sayings like these which stress reason and science:

Quote

12. A man cannot dispel his fear about the most important matters if he does not know what is the nature of the universe, but suspects the truth of some mythical story. So that, without natural science, it is not possible to attain our pleasures unalloyed.

13. There is no profit in securing protection in relation to men, if things above, and things beneath the earth, and indeed all in the boundless universe, remain matters of suspicion.

16. In but few things chance hinders a wise man, but the greatest and most important matters, reason has ordained, and throughout the whole period of life does and will ordain.

It would probably be helpful to think about what it is that might ever cause you to question that!

What I am beginning to suspect to be the case (and I am not just talking about you) is that people today are so conditioned to treat "science" and "reason" as "absolute" that they get uncomfortable with any suggestion that they themselves (science and reason) have limits which much be accounted for.

I am currently trying to finish editing the most recent podcast and we talk about the issue that some people are just never going to accept their lack of "certainty" and this bothers some people more than it does others. For some number of people no amount of data is ever going to be sufficient, while some others seem to be more willing to accept "probabilities" without being anxious about the lack of "certainty."

Sometimes that difference between people may relate to something clinical in them that amounts to a pathology of some kind, but I don't think that everyone who is bothered by lack of certainty is by any means subject to pathology. I think that there are very real and reasonable questions that have to be answered here, and as usual they come back to "limits and boundaries" that we have to wrestle with in our own minds.

"Science" and "reason" do not exist in the air - they are creations of human beings and they have natural limits and boundaries that exist due to our human nature as finite beings. We're NEVER going to know all we would like to know, and that means that "science" and "reason" are always going to have limits which is unfair to ask them to try to handle. You haven't ever died before, and so there is no way you can have the assurance of saying "i've been there so i KNOW that there is no life after death." You haven't been to every corner of the universe, and you never will, so you'll never be able to say that you "know from experience" what lurks there. "Science" and "reason" are creations of humanity and have the same limits we have.

We can choose to say that "I am a pragmatist and I accept that statistics-based evidence of all past experience pointing in one direction is satisfactory to me, and I don't worry about it any

further than that." But even that statement is based (at best) on "consensus" after experience (testing) in which you choose for yourself whose test results to trust and whose not to trust. Decisions on what is reliable to trust and what is not reliable to trust in the big questions of life cannot ever reasonably be based 100% on "I observed it for myself," because no one here has been alive except for a short period of time. The question of what evidence to accept can only be answered by philosophy, and that is where Epicurus points for the answer to the question. An absolute attitude of faith in human "Reason" or "Logic" or "Science," which simply cannot bear the burden which we are trying to place on them if we look to them as the equivalent of a supernatural god.

Supernatural gods don't exist, and neither does deified "Reason" or "Science." All we can do is be "prudence" in evaluating the evidence that we can gather. And that means subjecting EVERY input from ALL of the legs of the canon to the same scrutiny before we reach final opinions as to what is true. We may think we see a purple elephant in front of us, but we train ourselves to look again and again, from different perspectives, until we are sure, and the same goes for feelings of pleasure and pain, and the same goes for any data we receive through "anticipations." We accept for the moment that the data is honestly reported, but we never accept that what we experience at one moment is expected to be experienced in any future moment until we have tested each experience over time and found it to be repeatedly reliable. I choose to call that the foundation of all "reason" and "science" even though I am also accepting the fact that that data I am receiving through these three legs of my canonical faculties is subject to distortion and is necessarily far more limited than I would prefer it to be. It's ALL I have on which I can prudently decide what to be confident in and what not to be confident in.


Post by "Don" of November 6, 2020 at 9:07 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Quote

So, Epicurus says it's alright to use reason, right? We shouldn't rely on it to rationalize and come up with "ideal" absolutes, but we can use it to assimilate the information from our canonical senses.

Exactly! Reason is a tool, but it's not reliable without reference to the faculties of the canon.

Light bulb!  So, we don't rely on reason alone. We use it but we use it as a tool as an adjunct or complement to the Canonical senses once we've taken in available information or evidence from them.

If someone says "I feel the earth is flat. That feels true to me" that doesn't mean anything. What do your senses tell you? If the concept of a flat earth brings you Pleasure, what do your senses tell you including what scientific senses tell us through telescopes and discs travel. What do our mental senses tell us? What does our understanding of the universe tell us?


How does that sound?

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2020 at 9:09 PM

Don you and I just cross-posted so I did not see your last post before my longer response above...

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2020 at 9:17 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

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How does that sound?

I agree with most of that, but I would be careful about "If someone says "I feel the earth is flat. That feels true to me" that doesn't mean anything."

Were you to apply that strictly, you would be telling yourself to ignore the feeling of pleasure that you are hypothesizing that person received from the 'feeling that the world is flat' that you posit he is having. (I think of necessity what you are talking about there is an opinion rather than strictly a feeling alone.)

I don't think you should ever say that any data point should be 'ignored' -- it would be better to incorporate that data point into your understanding of your thought processes so that you accounted for having experienced that feeling of pleasure and thereby learned from it. If the experience was pleasurable then you will be naturally inclined to repeat it, but you need to learn that you can't expect to repeat it by expecting the world to prove to be flat by walking far enough in the same direction.

Maybe you can come to understand what it was in the experience that led to the feeling of pleasure, and maybe you can find other ways to experience that same pleasure, for example in reading fiction or otherwise recognizing that the belief in a flat earth is imaginary but for some reason brings you pleasure.

The point of course being that we need to incorporate this overall principle:

Quote

24. If you reject any single sensation, and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion, as to the appearance awaiting confirmation, **and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind,** you will confound all other sensations, as well, with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong.

Post by “Don” of November 6, 2020 at 9:38 PM

I think your distinction between an opinion and a "feeling"/reaction is important. That's the ambiguity of the word "feeling" that I'm struggling with. I cannot endorse "truthiness" or "going with your gut." But from what I'm reading from you and [Godfrey](#) is that we use our initial reaction as *one* criteria in concert with others + reason to bring it all together.

Am I getting closer?

Thanks for taking the time to engage me on this.

Post by “Cassius” of November 6, 2020 at 10:02 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

...we use our initial reaction as *one* criteria in concert with others + reason to bring it all together.

Am I getting closer?

Yes I think that is exactly the point, and I think that's also the answer to any concerns that anyone has about the "spiritual" experiences being discussed in the reverence and awe threads. The feelings are real and must be accounted for, but not by holding opinions that cannot be validated through a reasoned analysis of all the evidence available to us through all of the faculties.

"Spiritual" experiences are real in the sense that they describe real feelings which are occurring. But at the same time, we have all sorts of other evidence to consider as well regarding the nature of the universe, the absence of supernatural universe-creating gods, and the like. ALL the evidence has to be factored in so that we arrive at a reasoned opinion about the subject we're talking about. The reasoned opinion we end up with must acknowledge the reality of the feeling, but it must also acknowledge the reality of the other data, with the result being that no matter how intense the spiritual feeling we aren't going to throw out the evidence received through the other faculties.

And there you arrive at the conclusion that there are some times when we just have no reasonable alternative but to "wait" because we cannot come to an acceptable theory that incorporates all the evidence to our satisfaction. The only irreversible error would be to throw out some of the data and treat it as if it did not exist, because ruling out the reliability of any of the legs of the canon will thereby mean that our error can never be properly corrected. [Edit: And that is why I do not think it is proper to "throw out" the data of any experience, whether we call it 'spiritual' or whatever. If we experience it, something caused it, and it is far better to look patiently for the cause than to throw out the experience as if it did not happen.]

From Book 4, what i think is quite possibly the most important passage in Lucretius (and this version is an example of why I find Browne 1743 to be frequently the best in the deepest sections):

Quote

And though reason is not able to assign a cause why an object that is really four-square when near, should appear round when seen at a distance; yet, if we cannot explain this difficulty, it is better to give any solution, even a false one, than to deliver up all Certainty out of our power, to break in upon our first principle of belief, and tear up all foundations upon which our life and security depend. For not only all reason must be overthrown, but life itself must be immediately extinguished, unless you give credit to your senses. These direct you to fly from a precipice and other evils of this sort which are to be avoided, and to pursue what tends to your security. All therefore is nothing more than an empty parade of words that can be offered against the certainty of sense.

Lastly, as in a building, if the principle rule of the artificer be not true, if his line be not exact, or his level bear in to the least to either side, every thing must needs be wrong and crooked, the whole fabric must be ill-shaped, declining, hanging over, leaning and irregular, so that some parts will seem ready to fall and tumble down, because the whole was at first disordered by false principles. So the reason of things must of necessity be wrong and false which is founded upon a false representation of the senses.

Even in this passage, and especially in that last sentence, I think we could probably better translate. "So the reason of things must of necessity be wrong and false which is founded upon a false representation of the senses" seems to me to be another statement of giving credence to all legs of the canon as in [PD24](#) quoted above, rather than 'false representation of the senses' which seems a little too narrow. Likewise I think all of this passage should be read to refer to all three legs of the canon and not just seeing/hearing/tasting/touching/smelling.

Certainly the five senses are the first that come to mind, but the other two legs are of equal or at times superior concern to us. Pleasure and pain give us the motivations for life itself, and preconceptions also (depending on the various asserted definitions) appear to be essential to proper living. For example, there are times when we will in fact jump off that precipice, or step in front of the oncoming carriage, if such an action enables us to save the life of a friend in a situation where to do otherwise would poison our choice to live on having failed to do so,

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2020 at 10:14 PM

Quote

So the reason of things must of necessity be wrong and false which is founded upon a false representation of the senses.

I am thinking that that sentence must be intended to be sweeping in effect, meaning something like:

"So our opinions about the most important issues of life must of necessity be wrong and false if they are founded upon a false understanding of the nature and limits of the canonical faculties."

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2020 at 10:20 PM

Quote

the whole fabric must be ill-shaped, declining, hanging over, leaning and irregular, so that some parts will seem ready to fall and tumble down, because the whole was at first disordered by false principles.

In accord with the frequent pattern of using repetition for emphasis, I think that last passage I quoted in the post above is probably a mirror of this passage, and this one too should be read as sweeping in effect, something like:

"So the whole structure of our life will necessarily be ill-shaped, declining, hanging over, leaning, and irregular, so that some parts will seem ready to fall and tumble down, if we erect the structure of our life in a disorderly manner based on a false understanding of the way our canonical faculties work."

Post by "Don" of November 6, 2020 at 10:47 PM

This is all very helpful. Your explanation of the "I feel the earth is flat" was helpful in particular. So, we would need to know if it was an opinion or a reaction for them. And even if a pleasurable reaction, what was it about the "earth being flat" that aroused pleasure. Maybe it's not the false

"fact" that the "earth is flat" but some other component of thinking about the earth being flat that elicited the reaction of pleasure. The Earth is *not* flat. But if someone "feels" liked it is, they need to look at their other faculties to understand why they feel that way. BUT someone else's "feeling" that the earth is flat shouldn't cause me pain... Unless they try to impel me to embrace their false opinion. Then "si falsum est, accingere contra!"

I do sincerely appreciate your sticking with me on this!!

The quotes have been helpful as well.

Post by “Cassius” of November 6, 2020 at 10:58 PM

Yes Don I think that is the direction. It might also help to discuss this in greater detail:

[Quote from Don](#)

This is the aspect that makes me still eye Aristotle as an alternative.

What aspect of Aristotle has come to your attention that you find potentially attractive? Possibly in discussing the details of that attractiveness we would also be able to highlight the differences.

Every time I have tried to read Aristotle I have found his formulations to be highly unsatisfying, and I think Frances Wright was probably correct in accusing Aristotle of "pedantry":

From her [Chapter 15](#) of A Few Days In Athens:

Quote

“It might seem strange,” said Metrodorus, “that the pedantry of Aristotle should find so many imitators, and his dark sayings so many believers, in a city, too, now graced and enlightened by the simple language, and simple doctrines of an Epicurus. — But the language of truth is too simple for inexperienced ears. We start in search of knowledge, like the demigods of old in search of adventure, prepared to encounter giants, to scale mountains, to pierce into Tartarean gulfs, and to carry off our prize from the grip of some dark enchanter, invulnerable to all save to charmed weapons and deity-gifted assailants. To find none of all these things, but, in their stead, a smooth road through a pleasant country, with a familiar guide to direct our curiosity, and point out the beauties of the landscape, disappoints us of all exploit and all notoriety; and our vanity turns but too often from the fair and open champaigne, into error’s dark labyrinths,

where we mistake mystery for wisdom, pedantry for knowledge, and prejudice for virtue.”



ped·ant·ry

/ˈped(ə)ntrē/

noun

excessive concern with minor details and rules.

"to object to this is not mere pedantry"

Similar:

dogmatism

purism

literalism

formalism

overscrupulousness



Post by “Don” of November 6, 2020 at 11:31 PM

I'll admit my understanding of Aristotle is sketchy. One thing that attracts me to him is his penchant for assembling information and research from as many sources as possible. From what I know, he invented entire fields of science, especially biology. That appeals to me: the research-oriented aspect of Aristotle. He based a lot of his "science" work on observation. Later philosophers and theologians would take Aristotle's work as dogma and forget to observe nature themselves.

That being said, I think his idea that eudaimonia is largely dependent on luck and one's station in life is elitist and not much help to society at large. His focus on virtue and fulfilling your telos seems ill-suited to people finding his philosophy useful.

Maybe I'm weighing Epicureanism against a general humanism or secularism, but I feel (there's that word) I need a comprehensive philosophy. Something to study and practice.

What attracted me initially to Epicurus?

His was the only ancient Greek school to admit - even welcome - women. He didn't need any gods. Pleasure as the goal made sense: carpe diem "pluck the day" was attractive. It seemed like a down to earth philosophy but also had depth.

As a librarian, I have to see objective reality (Earth is round) honored, so I struggle with that word feeling. That's why I've been so adamant about translating pathē as reaction. I still think sometimes in absolutes like "human rights" etc. But I'm coming around to the social contract

and contextual nature of all "rights." I find George Carlin's quote intriguing:

Quote

Rights aren't rights if someone can take them away. They're privileges. That's all we've ever had in this country, is a bill of temporary privileges.

That seems to be the same thing Epicurus was saying sort of. We need to agree on what justice is then work to uphold that agreement.

Sorry. This went a little afield. I hope it sheds a little light on my current predicament.

Post by "Cassius" of November 6, 2020 at 11:58 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

One thing that attracts me to him is his penchant for assembling information and research from as many sources as possible. From what I know, he invented entire fields of science, especially biology. That appeals to me: the research-oriented aspect of Aristotle. He based a lot of his "science" work on observation.

And that very aspect I think bleeds over into what Frances Wright was characterizing as "pedantry" / excessive attention to detail.

It's interesting to compare that to the drift of the statement - where is it? the letter to Herodotus? - to the effect that we don't need a general theory of everything, but a theory that allows us to live happily. I don't want to overgeneralize here, but I can see the outline of a response to Aristotle in that remark, to the effect that the important thing is to grasp "the big picture" rather than pursuing details so doggedly that you don't seem to ever assemble the details into a correct view of the big picture.

No doubt (at least from what I have read) that Epicurus' views were a lot closer to Aristotle than to Plato, but I get the general sense, especially in reading Cicero's "On Ends," that the ancients themselves saw Aristotle as derivative from Plato and essentially a continuation of the Platonic school, rather than as a profound leader of his own school.

But as with you Don I am certainly no expert on Aristotle so my thoughts are necessarily of limited value, limited to what we can draw on as the impressions we have of him, which may not be at all accurate to the facts.

But its interesting to think about whether Epicurus might have held that Aristotle's "idea that eudaimonia is largely dependent on luck and one's station in life is elitist and not much help to society at large. His focus on virtue and fulfilling your telos seems ill-suited to people finding his philosophy useful" in fact may have resulted from his "excessive attention to detail" at the expense of processing the big picture from the details that were readily at hand when he started.

Post by “Cassius” of November 7, 2020 at 12:03 AM

As usual I think of a quote but can't find it. It seems like it ought to be right here in this section of Herodotus, but this doesn't seem to be what I am thinking of:

Quote

Furthermore, we must believe that to discover accurately the cause of the most essential facts is the function of the science of nature, and that blessedness for us in the knowledge of celestial phenomena lies in this and in the understanding of the nature of the existences seen in these celestial phenomena, and of all else that is akin to the exact knowledge requisite for our happiness: in knowing too that what occurs in several ways or is capable of being otherwise has no place here but that nothing which suggests doubt or alarm can be included at all in that which is naturally immortal and blessed.

Now this we can ascertain by our mind is absolutely the case.

But what falls within the investigation of risings and settings and turnings and eclipses, and all that is akin to this, is no longer of any value for the happiness which knowledge brings, but persons who have perceived all this, but yet do not know what are the natures of these things and what are the essential causes, are still in fear, just as if they did not know these things at all: indeed, their fear may be even greater, since the wonder which arises out of the observation of these things cannot discover any solution or realize the regulation of the essentials.

And for this very reason, even if we discover several causes for turnings and settings and risings and eclipses and the like, as has been the case already in our investigation of detail, we must not suppose that our inquiry into these things has not reached sufficient accuracy to contribute to our peace of mind and happiness.

So we must carefully consider in how many ways a similar phenomenon is produced on earth, when we reason about the causes of celestial phenomena and all that is imperceptible to the senses; and we must despise those persons who do not recognize either what exists or comes into being in one way only, or that which may occur in several ways in the case of things which can only be seen by us from a distance, and further are not aware under what conditions it is impossible to have peace of mind.

If, therefore, we think that a phenomenon probably occurs in some such particular way, and that in circumstances under which it is equally possible for us to be at peace, when we realize that it may occur in several ways, we shall be just as little disturbed as if we know that it occurs in some particular way.

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But I think this is worth quoting in regard to what we're discussing about Aristotle.

Post by “Cassius” of November 7, 2020 at 12:06 AM

Very similar, but from the letter to Pythocles - maybe a variation of the translation of this is what I am thinking about that we don't need a general theory of everything?

The fact that this sentiment is included in both Herodotus and Pythocles is surely a measure of its importance to Epicurus:

Quote

First of all then we must not suppose that any other object is to be gained from the knowledge of the phenomena of the sky, whether they are dealt with in connection with other doctrines or independently, than peace of mind and a sure confidence, just as in all other branches of study.

We must not try to force an impossible explanation, nor employ a method of inquiry like our reasoning either about the modes of life or with respect to the solution of other physical problems: witness such propositions as that 'the universe consists of bodies and the intangible,' or that 'the elements are indivisible,' and all such statements in circumstances where there is only one explanation which harmonizes with phenomena.

For this is not so with the things above us: they admit of more than one cause of coming into being and more than one account of their nature which harmonizes with our sensations.

For we must not conduct scientific investigation by means of empty assumptions and arbitrary principles, but follow the lead of phenomena: for our life has not now any place for irrational belief and groundless imaginings, but we must live free from trouble.

Now all goes on without disturbance as far as regards each of those things which may be explained in several ways so as to harmonize with what we perceive, when one admits, as we are bound to do, probable theories about them.

But when one accepts one theory and rejects another, which harmonizes as well with the phenomenon, it is obvious that he altogether leaves the path of scientific inquiry and has recourse to myth.

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Post by “Cassius” of November 7, 2020 at 12:10 AM

Also, Don, from the end of the letter to Pythocles, there is that pesky word "feelings" again! 😊

Quote

And most of all give yourself up to the study of the beginnings and of infinity and of the things akin to them, and also of the criteria of truth and of the feelings, and of the purpose for which we reason out these things.

For these points when they are thoroughly studied will most easily enable you to understand the causes of the details.

But those who have not thoroughly taken these things to heart could not rightly study them in themselves, nor have they made their own the reason for observing them.

Post by “Joshua” of November 12, 2020 at 9:26 PM

I'm listening to an audiobook called *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria* on my commute. I found something there worth adding here regarding the topic of 'reason'.

Pythagoras, as a philosopher and also a mathematician, seemed to believe that pure reason could be a bridge between mathematical fact and philosophical truth. It all had to do with the number 10.

If you plot one number in a given space, you have a point. If you plot 2 numbers, you have two points—therefore a line. Three points are needed to make a surface (or plane)—a triangle. Add a fourth point, and you have a pyramid—that is, a solid.

The Pythagoreans reasoned that these four attributes were the ground of mathematics, that by adding them up you have the perfect number— $1+2+3+4=10$. Since the facts of cosmology are the reflections of pure geometric truth, the number 10 is the key to cosmology. From Encyclopedia Britannica:

Quote

The Pythagoreans recognized the existence of nine heavenly bodies: Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the so-called Central Fire. So important was the number 10 in their view of cosmology that they believed there was a tenth body, Counter-Earth, perpetually hidden from us by the Sun.

These 10 bodies were arranged in concentric celestial spheres. How wonderfully reasoned!

And, of course, total bullshit. (Who is laughing at Epicurus' Sun now!?)

Neither reason nor logic can ever be canonical, because in both cases you have to start with premises. Those premises might be conjectural, in which case the conclusion cannot be called knowledge; or they might be *themselves* conclusions of prior reasoning, in which case they are only as good as the original inputs; or they might be knowledge in themselves, derived canonically.

But reason can never be the starting point. It requires *something* to operate on. The belief that we can reason our way from *nothing* to anything is one of the central flaws of so much ancient philosophy.

As for the original quote, here's a tiny thought experiment:

Pompeii: "How did you beat me? My army had more foot, more cavalry, more supplies, better ground..."

Caesar: "And my army had the morale. Feelings don't care about your facts."

Post by “Joshua” of November 12, 2020 at 10:02 PM

Apparently I've just been waiting for the right time and place to fume about that little dictum...Let's do it internet style!

10 Things I Hate about that Quote

With a countdown for dramatic effect!

10. It defines neither of its terms.
9. It has no descriptive power.
8. No real inferences can be made from it.
7. It often **falsely implies** in its speaker's argument a thorough review of ALL relevant facts.
6. And often **falsely infers** in the opponent's position an exclusively emotional appeal.
5. It's embarrassingly juvenile.
4. All while presuming to an unwarranted maturity.
3. It carries not a single drop of irony.
2. It is cheap, shabby and unbearably smug.
1. And, finally, it asks us to deny everything human in ourselves.

Post by “Elayne” of November 13, 2020 at 7:33 AM

[Joshua](#) yes! And let me add-- it rests on a false dichotomy between facts and feelings. A person who says this believes facts are objective, universally known to be true, when all perceptions are made from the POV of a subject (although often compared to reported perceptions of other subjects). There exists no known universal POV. The way we know our perceptions are "factual" (even if we don't realize it) is by their reliability/predictability. We learn this from infancy, by repeated observations.

So both sensory perceptions (data) and the reliability conclusions we draw from them are made by subjects, and feelings are felt by subjects. It's true we don't smell with our ears, nor do we hear with our feelings, and that is what the quote is trying, clumsily, to get at, while bashing feelings.

Some people do try to draw perceptual conclusions with their feelings-- they want something to be true, which doesn't make it true. Maybe they want it to be true that a hurricane isn't going to get their house, so they don't evacuate, for instance. But their feelings of not wanting the hurricane forecast to be accurate are just as real as the hurricane!

Post by “Cassius” of November 13, 2020 at 7:48 AM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

But reason can never be the starting point. It requires something to operate on. The belief that we can reason our way from nothing to anything is one of the central flaws of so much ancient philosophy.

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Apparently I've just been waiting for the right time and place to fume about that little dictum

Those are great observations! Glad the 10 planets were aligned to cause you to let loose with those comments! 😊