

Episode 154 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 10 - The Canon, Reason, and Nature 01

Post by "Cassius" of December 22, 2022 at 10:28 PM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Fifty-Four of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

We're now in the process of a series of podcasts intended to provide a general overview of Epicurean philosophy based on the organizational structure employed by Norman DeWitt in his book "Epicurus and His Philosophy."

This week we are going to begin Chapter Seven - The Canon, Reason, and Nature

- The Dethronement of Reason
- Ridicule
- Nature as the Norm
- Priority of Nature over Reason

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/52336152>

Post by "Cassius" of December 25, 2022 at 9:15 AM

[PD16](#). 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.

[PD22](#). We must consider both the real purpose, and all the evidence of direct perception, to which we always refer the conclusions of opinion; otherwise, all will be full of doubt and

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2799-episode-154-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-10-the-canon-reason-and-nature-01/>

confusion.

[PD23](#). If you fight against all sensations, you will have no standard by which to judge even those of them which you say are false.

[PD24](#). 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.

[PD25](#). If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles.

Diogenes Laertius:

Logic they reject as misleading. For they say it is sufficient for physicists to be guided by what things say of themselves. Thus in The Canon Epicurus says that the tests of truth are the sensations and concepts [preconceptions / anticipations] and the feelings; the Epicureans add to these the intuitive apprehensions of the mind.

The Wise Man will found a school, but not in such a manner as to draw the crowd after him; and will give readings in public, but only by request. He will be a dogmatist but not a mere skeptic; and he will be like himself even when asleep.

[Epicurean Canonics - Epicurus College Course Material](#)

Post by “Don” of December 25, 2022 at 9:49 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The Wise Man will found a school, but not in such a manner as to draw the crowd after him; and will give readings in public, but only by request. He will be a dogmatist but not a mere skeptic; and he will be like himself even when asleep.

The sage will found a school, but not in a way that attracts a crowd around themselves or plays to the mob.

...and will declare their beliefs and not remain in doubt about them.

...and will be the same person whether awake or asleep.

[Epicurean Sage](#)

My goal in this translation of Diogenes Laertius's Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book X.117-121, was to be as literal as possible to preserve the flavor of...

sites.google.com

Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2022 at 9:59 AM

Scheduling note: The podcasting team had a good conversation during the last recording session but given the importance of the subject we decided to postpone the recording of the first program on Chapter Seven til our next recording session. We expect to be back on a normal schedule next week.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 26, 2022 at 10:30 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The podcasting team had a good conversation during the last recording session but given the importance of the subject we decided to postpone the recording of the first program on Chapter Seven till our next recording session. We expect to be back on a normal schedule next week.

The good topic of conversation which occurred was on the importance of friendship, while we waited for a podcast member to join. There were some good ideas brought up for future exploration. The postponement was due to a technological glitch -- an alarm clock malfunction -- so our window of time was too short to dive into the anticipated DeWitt material.

Off the top of your head Cassius, can you remember what we discussed regarding friendship?

Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2022 at 11:18 AM

The main topic was the reading Epicurean theory about the virtue of friendship is not sufficient - we need to take steps to cultivate actual Epicurean friends, first online (since that today is currently the only practical way to do so), and then move next to "real life."

Post by “Joshua” of December 29, 2022 at 4:03 AM

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UluVI_5QjNE97kcmxrqPLQhyjYbyrO7q/view?usp=share link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UluVI_5QjNE97kcmxrqPLQhyjYbyrO7q/view?usp=share_link)

If that links works, it will take you to a .png file on my google drive that is an export of a drawio flow chart on epistemology. I'm finding the task to be a bit overwhelming, but it might prove interesting.

I've only covered sensation so far, and have barely scratched the surface there. I have some ideas where to go with feelings, but it's all quite vague in my mind at the moment.

Prolepsis/Anticipations/Preconceptions remain completely obscure to me. I just don't understand them very well. I'm hoping this will give me a framework from which to approach the upcoming chapters in DeWitt, because this is a serious weak point of mine.

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2022 at 8:36 AM

OK my first comment would be that by placing 'CONCEPTION' as one of the three labels on the legs at the far left, you are taking sides (which you may or may not want to do) with Anticipations / Preconceptions BEING THE SAME AS conceptions. DeWitt advocates against that and I think for good reason. Yes that is a very possible reading of Diogenes Laertius, and Bailey uses that word, but most other translators do not. Against that view is Velleius, and to take that position from the beginning would skirt the very deep issues that I think DeWitt does a good job of describing. DeWitt's formula is that "conceptions" are the "output" of the thinking process, while the better labelings of the "inputs" are 1 - anticipations (or preconceptions or prolepsis) / 2 -feelings / 3 - 5 senses,

And the real issue is being clear to illustrate the location in the chart where "error" arises, which most people seem to agree to be in the opinion-making process (which seems to me to be more

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the "conceptualization" process). Until that point the three legs of the canon at the very left are presumably operating irrationally and mechanically and wherein '[all sensations are true](#)'. I personally think that the three legs of the Canon MUST be considered to operate "automatically" in that sense (of not having any component of opinion) in order for them to function as standards of "truth" or "measurement." To me, the "[all sensations are true](#)" formula makes the most sense by seeing all of the inputs from all of the 3 legs as "sensations" rather than just using that word to describe the 5 bodily senses. It makes sense to me to refer to the data from pain and pleasure as "senses" (I sense pleasure and pain) and for the sake of being parallel I would see "an anticipation" as data received from the faculty of anticipations just as would see light or sound as data received from the faculty of the 5 senses.

That leaves concept-formation and concept-application much further to the right on the chart, almost near the end, which is where error can and does occur and where you have to do the "waiting" and the "analogizing" and the application of the PDs in the mid-20s.

And given the way you are drawing the chart, you may want to have "images" in there somewhere too, or at least annotate it as to whether you see images to be part of anticipations, feelings, or sensations. This is where DeWitt hypothesizes that they were seeing the brain as a "suprasensory organism" - because you don't see "images" with your eyes.

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2022 at 8:59 AM

Also Joshua topics to be considered here are:

1 - We've been discussing anticipations since the forum started and there likely is not enough evidence to be 100% sure which theory is correct. I personally think that DeWitt is onto something with his "intuition" word, and I think the most persuasive discussions we've had in the past consider words like a faculty of "pattern-recognition" which is not so far from intuition. In this discussion the "images" discussions are critical to include and not just exclude, like some people want to do when they read the Diogenes Laertius description and conclude that it's simple: we see series of oxes and put together a picture in our minds of an ox. Surely that does happen as part of the thinking process, but I think the great weight of the evidence is that this comes later in the thought process, while anticipations are a faculty that generate raw input closer to the beginning of the process.

2 - And closely related is the whole "blank slate" issue. I think DeWitt and others are persuasive that "blank slate" is Aristotelian or otherwise, and that Epicurus did NOT consider himself to be a blank slate person who thinks that everything in our minds comes strictly through the five senses.

Of course what we are talking about now is not all in this chapter - it's in the later discussions of Anticipations.

There is a good Voula Tsouna article on Anticipations in which she reviews what Sedley has said and disagrees with some of his analysis, so if those two are not together then we are going to have to go in from the beginning keeping several alternatives in mind. Personally however I think the best way to steer clear of an improper conclusion is to insist that "images" be included in the picture before we can conclude we have a good answer as to what Epicurus really thought.

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2022 at 9:18 AM

And one more thing Joshua, I would not set in stone any thoughts on this chapter (Canon, Reason, Nature) until you have read the upcoming chapter (Sensations, Anticipations, Feelings) as they are tightly connected.

Post by "Joshua" of December 29, 2022 at 9:25 AM

Since I've only focused on sensations in the chart I'm going to restrain myself to one thing right now--which is that I question whether error really does enter in that late in the process. I think there are numerous visual tests that demonstrate that the brain starts lying pretty much immediately upon receiving input. The retinal blind spot test is a good example. Rather than reporting two gaps in the visual field, which is clearly what the eyes sense and report due to their structure, the brain is constantly fabricating false information from the surrounding true information. The error is instantaneous.

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2022 at 9:44 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Since I've only focused on sensations in the chart I'm going to restrain myself to one thing right now--which is that I question whether error really does enter in that late in the process.

"that late"? Just so I am clear what you are saying, what is your current view of "[all sensations are true](#)"?

...this is the Lucretius book iv material we discussed last night:

[478] You will find that the concept of the true is begotten first from the senses, and that the senses cannot be gainsaid. For something must be found with a greater surety, which can of its own authority refute the false by the true. Next then, what must be held to be of greater surety than sense? Will reason, sprung from false sensation, avail to speak against the senses, when it is wholly sprung from the senses? For unless they are true, all reason too becomes false. Or will the ears be able to pass judgement on the eyes, or touch on the ears? or again will the taste in the mouth refute this touch; will the nostrils disprove it, or the eyes show it false? It is not so, I trow. For each sense has its faculty set apart, each its own power, and so it must needs be that we perceive in one way what is soft or cold or hot, and in another the diverse colours of things, and see all that goes along with colour. Likewise, the taste of the mouth has its power apart; in one way smells arise, in another sounds. And so it must needs be that one sense cannot prove another false. Nor again will they be able to pass judgement on themselves, since equal trust must at all times be placed in them. Therefore, whatever they have perceived on each occasion, is true.

DeWitt reconciles this by concluding that "true" means "truly reported" without injection of opinion. Is that what you are saying or do you see it differently?

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2022 at 9:51 AM

Just for the record we were also talking last night about the contrast between

Descartes: "I think therefore I am"

vs

Jefferson:

Jefferson to John Adams, August 15, 1820: [\(Full version at Founders.gov\)](#)

.... But enough of criticism: let me turn to your puzzling letter of May 12. on matter, spirit, motion etc. It's crowd of scepticisms kept me from sleep. I read it, and laid it down: read it, and laid it down, again and again: and to give rest to my mind, **I was obliged to recur ultimately to my habitual anodyne, 'I feel: therefore I exist.'** I feel bodies which are not myself: there are other existencies then. I call them *matter*. I feel them changing place. This gives me motion. Where there is an absence of matter, I call it *void*, or *nothing*, or *immaterial space*. On the basis of sensation, of matter and motion, we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need. I can conceive *thought* to be an action of a particular organisation of matter, formed for that purpose by it's creator, as well as that *attraction* in an action of matter, or *magnetism* of loadstone. When he who denies to the Creator the power of endowing matter with the mode of action called *thinking* shall shew how he could endow the Sun with the mode of action called *attraction*, which reins the planets in the tract of their orbits, or how an absence of matter can have a will, and, by that will, put matter into motion, then the materialist may be lawfully required to explain the process by which matter exercises the faculty of thinking. When once we quit the basis of sensation, all is in the wind. **To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise:** but I believe I am supported in my creed of materialism by Locke, Tracy, and Stewart.

Post by "Joshua" of December 29, 2022 at 10:14 AM

Well...does a square tower *truly* look round from far away?

I think the sensation is reported accurately to the brain, and the brain involuntarily adds a layer of interpretation which may be accurate, or not, and that this happens concurrently with the sensation. How do I know if the brain is interpreting the information accurately? By comparing the interpretation with other sensory input.

If square towers look round from far away, and round towers look round from far away, how can I know whether the tower I'm seeing from far away is round or square? Neither reason nor logic have any power to settle that question--I just need more sensory input. I need to get closer to the tower. Another way to put this would be to say that any given sensation gives accurate information, buy no individual sensation contains all possible accurate information. My nose tells me there's an apple pie. My eyes don't see one. Which sense is accurate? Probably both--I'm just looking in the wrong place.

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2022 at 10:22 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Another way to put this would be to say that any given sensation gives accurate information, but no individual sensation contains all possible accurate information.

Yes I think that's the key. The senses are irrational and do not inject any opinion when they report something. They report what they receive without comment. But no single sensation tells the whole story, nor does a later sensation have the power to say that the first one was "wrong." The key seems to be that all issues of "right" and "wrong" or "true" or "false" are issues that are assembled in the volitional mind, and a large part of all this epistemology we are about to discuss is how to assemble the data into concepts or pictures or opinions or whatever, and what standards we are going to use to decide whether the concept or picture or opinion is "true" or "false."

And I think that's where the issue of "certain" or "confident" comes in, and we have to define what those words mean, because we're not fictional supernatural gods who have access to omniscience or omnipresence to be able to say that your own perspective or conclusion is "final." We don't have access to that kind of finality (which is made up in the first place) and yet we still have to have an understanding of what it is for us to "know" something with enough confidence to base our life on it and make decisions.

That section of Lucretius that we are discussing in Book 4 is probably one of the best ways to get at all this, in my view. And it's interesting that that discussion comes right around the same place as the discussion of "illusions" and also "images."

Post by "Joshua" of December 29, 2022 at 10:24 AM

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!"

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2022 at 10:25 AM

If we don't have a theory that allows us to understand this approach, then that's when we lose confidence in the natural faculties and start looking for other means of understanding the "true world" that is allegedly beyond the reach of our senses.

Quote

[500] And if reason is unable to unravel the cause, why those things which close at hand were square, are seen round from a distance, still it is better through lack of reasoning to be at fault in accounting for the causes of either shape, rather than to let things clear seen slip abroad from your grasp, and to assail the grounds of belief, and to pluck up the whole foundations on which life and existence rest. For not only would all reasoning fall away; life itself too would collapse straightway, unless you chose to trust the senses, and avoid headlong spots and all other things of this kind which must be shunned, and to make for what is opposite to these. Know, then, that all this is but an empty store of words, which has been drawn up and arrayed against the senses.

[513] Again, just as in a building, if the first ruler is awry, and if the square is wrong and out of the straight lines, if the level sags a whit in any place, it must needs be that the whole structure will be made faulty and crooked, all awry, bulging, leaning forwards or backwards, and out of harmony, so that some parts seem already to long to fall, or do fall, all betrayed by the first wrong measurements; even so then your reasoning of things must be awry and false, which all springs from false senses.

[522] Now it is left to explain in what manner the other senses perceive each their own object—a path by no means stony to tread.

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2022 at 10:28 AM

It has always struck me that this sentence seems to be particularly thorny for the translators to make clear. This is Bailey:

[500] And if reason is unable to unravel the cause, why those things which close at hand were square, are seen round from a distance, still it is better through lack of reasoning to be at fault in accounting for the causes of either shape, rather than to let things clear seen slip abroad from your grasp, and to assail the grounds of belief, and to pluck up the whole foundations on which life and existence rest.

The different translations I have seen almost never fail to seem awkward, but the meaning seems to be:

It's better to admit that you don't know rather than to admit that there is anything beyond or above the senses that will let you determine the answer without them, or in contradiction of them. Because if you fall for that trap then you'll be totally lost in imaginary traps.

[Edit: Scratch that. More importantly, the sentence that is even harder to translate seems to be at the end of that, because the "senses" should not be described as false. (As it seems to me he often does Brown does a little better):

Bailey: [513] Again, just as in a building, if the first ruler is awry, and if the square is wrong and out of the straight lines, if the level sags a whit in any place, it must needs be that the whole structure will be made faulty and crooked, all awry, bulging, leaning forwards or backwards, and out of harmony, so that some parts seem already to long to fall, or do fall, all betrayed by the first wrong measurements; even so then your reasoning of things must be awry and false, which all springs from false senses.

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

Munro: Once more, as in a building, if the rule first applied is wry, and the square is untrue and swerves from its straight lines, and if there is the slightest hitch in any part of the level, all the construction must be faulty, all must be wry, crooked, sloping, leaning forwards, leaning backwards, without symmetry, so that some parts seem ready to fall, others do fall, ruined all by the first erroneous measurements; so too all reason of things must needs prove to you distorted and false, which is founded on false senses.

]

Post by "Joshua" of December 29, 2022 at 10:41 AM

Quote

It's better to admit that you don't know rather than to admit that there is anything beyond or above the senses that will let you determine the answer without them, or in contradiction of them. Because if you fall for that trap then you'll be totally lost in imaginary traps.

Something we discussed at length on the 3rd episode in the Pythocles series--the size of the Sun.

On an unrelated note, one thing I learned from looking up the definition of "norm" in this chapter is that its etymological root is Latin "norma", from Greek gnomon, meaning carpenter's

square or the protruding piece on a sundial. DeWitt repeatedly says that for Epicurus "Nature furnishes the norm."

Post by "Todd" of December 29, 2022 at 10:49 AM

In what way are the sense experiences of a person under the influence of psychedelics "true"?

I can only make sense of "[all sensations are true](#)," as meaning "all sensations are experienced," or, "all sensations are sensed."

If by "true", you mean, "corresponding to reality", I would have to say that statement is false.

How would you respond?

Post by "Joshua" of December 29, 2022 at 11:09 AM

I've never experienced psychedelics, but going by report I would analyze them under the rubric I outlined above. Only in this case, instead of the brain 'involuntarily adding a layer of interpretation', it cakes it on so thickly that the reported sensation is altered completely before the conscious mind has time to act upon it. Here's a thought experiment: suppose you had one optic nerve simultaneously grafted to two different brains. One brain is high, the other is clear-- what does the clear brain see?

...I've been up since 5 pm.

Post by "Joshua" of December 29, 2022 at 11:15 AM

I should add that the way the "square tower" issue is explained by some commentators, it does reduce to a tautology as you suggest--'sense organs sense'. But no inferences can be made from that, so I take it for granted that that wasn't it's proper application.

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2022 at 11:23 AM

[Quote from Todd](#)

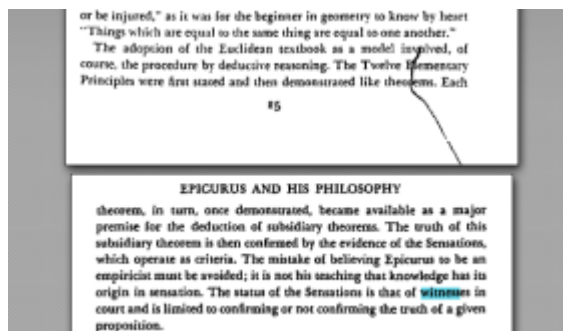
If by "true", you mean, "corresponding to reality", I would have to say that statement is false.

"Corresponding to reality" is exactly the sense in which Dewitt says "true" is NOT meant in the formulation "[all sensations are true](#)."

His analogy is to a courtroom witness who is testifying "truthfully" as far as he or she was able to see, but due to perspective or some other issue that witness did not see the full big picture. They report without any intent to deceive the raw data that they observe, but they (the witness, or the sense) does not report any "opinion" about what they saw at all.

That's the essential issue and DeWitt's suggestion makes perfect sense to me

Here's one reference, but there is more. I also have an article he wrote I thought was already here but will upload again to be sure:



Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2022 at 11:30 AM

Here is DeWitt's article focusing on the subject. I am having trouble getting the Greek word in the summary typed in - if any moderator has the ability to fix that in the description (where I have placed the _____) please do.

File

[Norman DeWitt - "Epicurus - All Sensations Are True"](#)



DeWitt's interpretation of the "all sensations are true" controversy.



Cassius

December 29, 2022 at 12:23 PM

Post by "Todd" of December 29, 2022 at 11:35 AM

Quote

The aim of this article is to show reasons for believing that the statement in the heading is false as usually understood

So far so good! 😊

Post by "Todd" of December 29, 2022 at 11:37 AM

Maybe I'm jumping the gun here, but if we agree that it is false as generally understood, what is the value of continuing to use it?

Need to read the article though...perhaps all will become clear.

Post by "Cassius" of December 29, 2022 at 11:37 AM

It's been a long while since I read the article in full but I am expecting both Joshua and you Todd will find yourself in agreement with it. As DeWitt states in the summary, on it's face the

statement is absurd, and since we don't usually expect Epicurus to be taking absurd positions, something else must be going on! As often is the case we might not all end up agreeing with DeWitt's precise phrasing, but I think points the way in the right direction.

Quote from Norman DeWitt

The aim of this article is to show reasons for believing that the statement in the heading is false as usually understood. It is absurd; the documentation is deficient, misleading, and from prejudiced sources; advocates of its validity go beyond their authorities. It is inconsistent with Epicurus' theory of perception, his terminology, his account of vision, his classifications, his treatment of the criteria in his [Principal Doctrines](#), his account of heavenly phenomena in the letter to Pythocles, and his recommendations to students. Ancient proofs of it are polemical sophistries. Modern misinterpretations have arisen from the ambiguity of ἀληθής which has three meanings in Epicureanism: 1. real or self-existent; 2. relatively true; 3. absolutely true. Sensations have been confused with judgments.

Post by “Joshua” of December 29, 2022 at 11:37 AM

I also need to read that article!

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2022 at 11:59 AM

Joshua et al --- it looks like DeWitt updated and shortened his argument in the article and included it in his book starting on page 135 under "Epicurus not an empiricist."



Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2022 at 12:24 PM

Edit Note: The original post of the DeWitt article has been updated with cite added and some highlighting deleted. Thanks to Todd for catching that.

Post by “Todd” of December 29, 2022 at 12:50 PM

OK, so here is my summary of that article.

Epicurus said something like "[all sensations are true](#)."

He was arguing against skepticism, and he meant "real" (I would say, "actually experienced") as opposed to "factually correct".

That he didn't mean "factually correct" is abundantly clear from other things he said.

Quote

As a philosopher he was engaged in the struggle for survival in a den of philosophers, many of them sceptics. Before them he maintained the doctrine that [all sensations are true](#) in the sense of real. In practice his attitude was thoroughly pragmatic, like that of the modern scientist. He looked upon sensations as possessing an infinite range of validity.

I also liked the following quote, because it's something I had been thinking myself, as a response to idea that reason cannot refute the senses.

Quote

Far more deceptive...is the third prong of the argument: reason cannot refute the sensations because reason is dependent upon the sensations. This is true in one sense and false in another. The sense in which it is true is this: reason in the aggregate cannot refute sensation in the aggregate, because reason depends upon the senses for its data. The sense in which it is false is this: reason in the aggregate cannot refute the particular sensation.... In this sense, reason constantly refutes the sensations.

Post by "Don" of December 29, 2022 at 1:34 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Here is DeWitt's article focusing on the subject. I am having trouble getting the Greek word in the summary typed in - if any moderator has the ability to fix that in the description (where I have placed the _____) please do.

File

[Norman DeWitt - "Epicurus - All Sensations Are True"](#)



DeWitt's interpretation of the "all sensations are true" controversy.



Cassius

December 29, 2022 at 12:23 PM

Here it is in plain text for you to copy:

αληθής

Also

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἀληθ-ής](#)

Post by “Don” of December 29, 2022 at 1:41 PM

My take, from an ancient Epicurean perspective, would be that the senses receive the films of the images onto the sense organs as a die casts a piece of metal. The error arises when the mind interprets (almost immediately or simultaneously) the impression made by the die.

Post by “Little Rocker” of December 29, 2022 at 2:33 PM

In case anyone else would find it useful, I've attached a dense, but relatively clear and informative piece of recent scholarship on Epicurean perception, truth, and illusion. It seems to me that the author (Hahmann) manages to both survey the puzzles and advance some of his own lines of interpretation.

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2022 at 3:23 PM

Thank you Little Rocker! As I read the Hahmann article it seems to me to be largely consistent or at least compatible with the approach DeWitt takes in his article and book. As I read all three the key point seems to be something like that every impression strikes us as "real" from the perspective that it is in fact an impression received by a sense faculty, but that each impression has to be evaluated before our minds can judge any inference from that impression to be "true" or "false" to the full external reality.

Does anyone read these articles as going in significantly different directions?

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 29, 2022 at 4:15 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Since I've only focused on sensations in the chart I'm going to restrain myself to one thing right now--which is that I question whether error really does enter in that late in the process. I think there are numerous visual tests that demonstrate that the brain starts lying pretty much immediately upon receiving input. The retinal blind spot test is a good example. Rather than reporting two gaps in the visual field,

I see you've talked about observing a round tower vs a square tower at a distance. Now what about the sensations of pain or pleasure? These come in through ears, eyes, nose, tongue, and skin -- and these sense faculties always tell the truth regarding pain or pleasure.

Post by “Todd” of December 29, 2022 at 4:28 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

As I read all three the key point seems to be something like that every impression strikes us as "real" from the perspective that it is in fact an impression received by a sense faculty, but that each impression has to be evaluated before our minds can judge any inference from that impression to be "true" or "false" to the full external reality.

That seems reasonable to me, but I'll admit that I'm not sure I completely understood Hahmann.

Also, I found these two statements curious:

Quote from DeWitt

...Sextus Empiricus, who is almost unique among critics in exhibiting no prejudice against Epicurus.

Quote from Hahmann

...in the case of Sextus Empiricus, we are also dealing with a hostile source who uses Epicurean philosophy in order to reach his own skeptical conclusions

Is Hahmann out-DeWitting DeWitt?!?!

Post by “Little Rocker” of December 29, 2022 at 5:04 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2799-episode-154-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-10-the-canon-reason-and-nature-01/>

Yeah, I also get the sense that they largely agree, especially about the what Hahmann calls a 'coherence-based approach' to adjudicating conflicting sense impressions (for example, 'the stick looks bent, but feels straight'). They are certainly both aiming to explain why the view is perfectly normal, possibly right, definitely not insane.

What I appreciate about Hahmann is that his Greek is transliterated, and he is less prone to using it without translation. I also appreciate that he explores to what extent (if any) Epicurus' confidence in perception differs from Stoic and Aristotelian confidence in perception. They were all empiricists, so they all required some mechanism for addressing Plato's pesky 'bent stick' example. So basically, I think Hahmann fills out the picture a bit.

Quote from Todd

Is Hahmann out-DeWitting DeWitt?!?!

Ha! I'm only getting a sense of the meaning of 'DeWitting' from context, but perhaps this could be a case where the apparent tension can be resolved. Maybe DeWitt means to suggest that Sextus was never particularly hostile to Epicurus (as so many were), while Hahmann means to remind the reader that Sextus was a skeptic, so his chief aim was to convince people that dogmatists like Epicurus were suffering from a psychic illness. Sextus even occasionally cops to using weak, but effective arguments to get what he wants--curing people of dogmatism.

Post by “Todd” of December 29, 2022 at 5:19 PM

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

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DeWitt makes much ado about suspecting non-Epicurean sources (particularly Cicero) of not being honest in presenting Epicurus' views. Probably rightly so.

I thought it was amusing that here we have a rare (possibly unique) case of DeWitt declaring a source to be unprejudiced, while another author is raising alarms.

And you're right, that those two statements are technically not contradictory.

Post by “Little Rocker” of December 29, 2022 at 5:27 PM

Quote from Todd

I thought it was amusing that here we have a rare (possibly unique) case of DeWitt declaring a source to be unprejudiced, while another author is raising alarms.

Ah, yes, now I get it! I guess there's always the question of whether the person attempts to faithfully represent the view, but then cavalierly dismisses it on specious grounds or willfully mis-represents the view to make it easier to dismiss.

They do seem to agree that we should rely on Sextus for the definition of truth, which is where DeWitt so effusively praises Sextus.

Quote from Hahmann

But Sextus Empiricus gives us also the most explicit definition of truth in Epicurus.

Post by “Don” of December 29, 2022 at 7:48 PM

I haven't had a chance to read the paper/chapter yet (on the [to-do list!](#)), but it's one interpretation of the "true" is that sense impressions originate with "real" truly existing objects and so we can rely on our senses that there IS indeed a real, external world that exists independently of us? Were there schools in ancient Greece that taught we couldn't be sure if this?

Literally, blue skying it here.

Post by “Cassius” of December 29, 2022 at 10:08 PM

It's my understanding that in generic terms that would be exactly what Plato advocated, that the senses are insufficient to give us reliable information about the true world. And I would think in support of that you can cite Diogenes of Oinoanda saying that Epicurus agreed that there is a flux, as D of O attributed to Aristotle, but that Epicurus held the flux not to be so fast that our senses could not apprehend it.

Post by “Don” of December 30, 2022 at 4:54 AM

Reading through the Routledge chapter and it strikes me that when they mention *enargeias*, this appears to be a related word to the one that Epicurus used to describe our perception of the gods in the letter to Menoikeus:

Gods exist, and the knowledge of them is manifest to the mind's eye (ἐναργῆς *enargēs*).

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ε , ἐναπο-στέγω , ἐναργ-ής](#)

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ε , ἐναπο-στέγω , ἐνάργ-εια](#)

Post by “Don” of December 31, 2022 at 12:57 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

The sage will found a school, but not in a way that attracts a crowd around themselves or plays to the mob.

I don't know if this is a repeat of info, but I just discovered today that this could be a response (or a jab) at Theophrastus, head of Aristotle's school, who regularly spoke to thousands of pupils:

Quote from Diogenes Laertius 5.2.37

About 2000 pupils used to attend his lectures. In a letter to Phantias the Peripatetic, among other topics, he speaks of a tribunal as follows²: "To get a public or even a select circle such as one desires is not easy. If an author reads his work, he must re-write it. Always to shirk revision and ignore criticism is a course which the present generation of pupils will no longer tolerate." And in this letter he has called some one

"pedant."

Post by "Cassius" of December 31, 2022 at 1:06 PM

Very interesting and thank you Don! It is almost as if Diogenes Laertius was working from a list of questions that he wanted to address as to every philosopher, and that almost everything that he recorded about Epicurus comes from a desire to add in Epicurus' views to this list of topics that he wanted to cover. And that we could learn a lot by looking at what Diogenes Laertius records from that perspective.

If so, that would be entirely consistent with the [Nikolsky](#) article and his observation that by the time Diogenes Laertius was writing he (Diogenes) was influenced by the Division of Carneades. And that would lead to the conclusion that Diogenes Laertius was applying a method of analysis that was current to Diogenes' own time, but which was not necessarily reflective of the time of Epicurus):

Quote from Boris Nikolsky

If Epicurus did not divide pleasures into kinetic and static, the question arises where Cicero and Diogenes Laertius found this idea. We will be able to answer this question if we examine the context in which a classification of pleasures is normally proposed. Both Cicero and Diogenes speak about it when they wish to contrast Epicurus' doctrine with the Cyrenaics' views. According to them, the Cyrenaics recognized only one type of pleasure, pleasure in motion, whereas Epicurus admits two types - pleasure 'in motion' and pleasure 'in a state of rest.' Besides, it should be noted that in comparing Epicurus' and the Cyrenaics' ideas Cicero proceeds from a description of various ethic doctrines that goes back to Carneades and is related to Carneades' division of theories of the supreme good (divisio Carneadea): using the classification principle 'thesis - antithesis - synthesis', the author of this division contraposed the definitions of the supreme good as pleasure in motion, as the absence of pain, and Epicurus' view which he believed to synthesize both of these concepts. Probably, Cicero received this view of Epicurus' concept of pleasure through Antiochus of Ascalon, who, as Cicero himself reported, had often used the divisio Carneadea in his reasoning. Let us now look at the tradition upon which the text by Diogenes Laertius is based.

Post by "Cassius" of December 31, 2022 at 1:07 PM

I've never bothered to read this before from Wikipedia:

Carneades ([/kɑːrˈniːədiːz/](#); [Greek](#): Καρνεάδης, *Karneadēs*, "of [Carnea](#)"; 214/3–129/8 BC^[2]) was a [Greek](#) philosopher^[3] and perhaps the most prominent head of the [Skeptical Academy](#) in ancient Greece.^[3] He was born in [Cyrene](#).^[4] By the year 159 BC^[citation needed], he had begun to attack many previous [dogmatic](#) doctrines, especially [Stoicism](#) and even the [Epicureans](#)^[5] whom previous skeptics had spared^[citation needed]. As [scholarch](#) (leader) of the [Academy](#), he was one of three philosophers sent to [Rome](#) in 155 BC where his lectures on the uncertainty of [justice](#) caused consternation among leading politicians.^{[6][7][8]} He left no writings.^[9] Many of his opinions are known only via his successor [Clitomachus](#).^[10] He seems to have doubted the ability not just of the [senses](#) but of [reason](#) too in acquiring [truth](#). His skepticism was, however, moderated by the belief that we can, nevertheless, ascertain probabilities (not in the sense of statistical probability, but in the sense of persuasiveness)^[11] of truth, to enable us to act.^[12]

Carneades is known as an [Academic Skeptic](#). Academic Skeptics (so called because this was the type of skepticism taught in [Plato's Academy](#) in [Athens](#)) hold that [all knowledge is impossible](#), except for the knowledge that all other knowledge is impossible

German Wikipedia has more detail:

Divisio Carneadea

Another method is what Cicero called it *Divisio Carneadea* ("Classification according to Carnades"). It consists in the collection and classification of not only all the solutions to a problem that have been expressed so far, but also all possible solutions. Cicero illustrates this using the example of [Goods theory](#). The individual arts or. Techniques such as medicine (healing art) or navigation (helmsman's art) have reference points for which they are studied and practiced (health or. safe seafaring). Reason is "art", the point of reference of which is "life", that is, according to Hellenistic understanding, the right life. [Eudaimonie](#) (Bliss, happy life, Latin *vita beata*). The nature of Eudaimonie and thus the way to it is controversial among the philosophers. First of all, there is a division of the teaching of goods according to the different views on the nature of eudaimony. Some seek eudaimony in experiencing pleasure, others in a state of painlessness, others in realizing the natural. Another principle of division that is combined with the first is the distinction according to the type of goal sought. Either the goal is something desired (for example, pleasure), the attainment of which is to bring about eudaimony, or the striving itself also contains the goal in itself, so that eudaimonia is realized even if there is no final success. For example, the Stoics see the pursuit of the natural as a goal in itself. The combination of both divisions results in six possible Eudaimon teachings. Additional possibilities arise if virtue is included as something sought.^[32] The variety of the possibilities put together should lead to the relativization of all teachings and thus to the insight

that none of them may claim generality.

Post by “Don” of December 31, 2022 at 1:13 PM

Quote from Nikolsky

If Epicurus did not divide pleasures into kinetic and static,

I still think Epicurus (and Metrodorus and Philodemus) did use those categories; however, I think much ado has been made of them by later commentators.

But that's a conversation for another thread 😊

Post by “Cassius” of December 31, 2022 at 1:17 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I still think Epicurus (and Metrodorus and Philodemus) did use those categories; however, I think much ado has been made of them by later commentators.

But that's a conversation for another thread 😊

Yes the important issue you've brought up here is how so much of what was recorded doesn't seem to be just a random list of what Epicurus was focused on, but an attempt to lay the philosophies against one another so the reader can compare and contrast them. So that when we find something significant in Epicurus we're likely to find the same issue discussed in Aristotle or Plato or the other previous schools, and if we go looking for those that will help us give context and meaning to what Epicurus was saying.

Post by “Don” of December 31, 2022 at 1:22 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

But that's a conversation for another thread

Like this one 😊 ...

Thread

[Do Pigs Value Katastematic Pleasure? \(Summer 2022 K / K Discussion\)](#)

Had this been shared before?

<https://www.academia.edu/resource/work/47860495>



Don

June 29, 2022 at 11:26 PM

Post by “Cassius” of January 2, 2023 at 4:46 PM

Episode 154 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week we start Chapter 7 - "The Canon, Reason, And Nature"

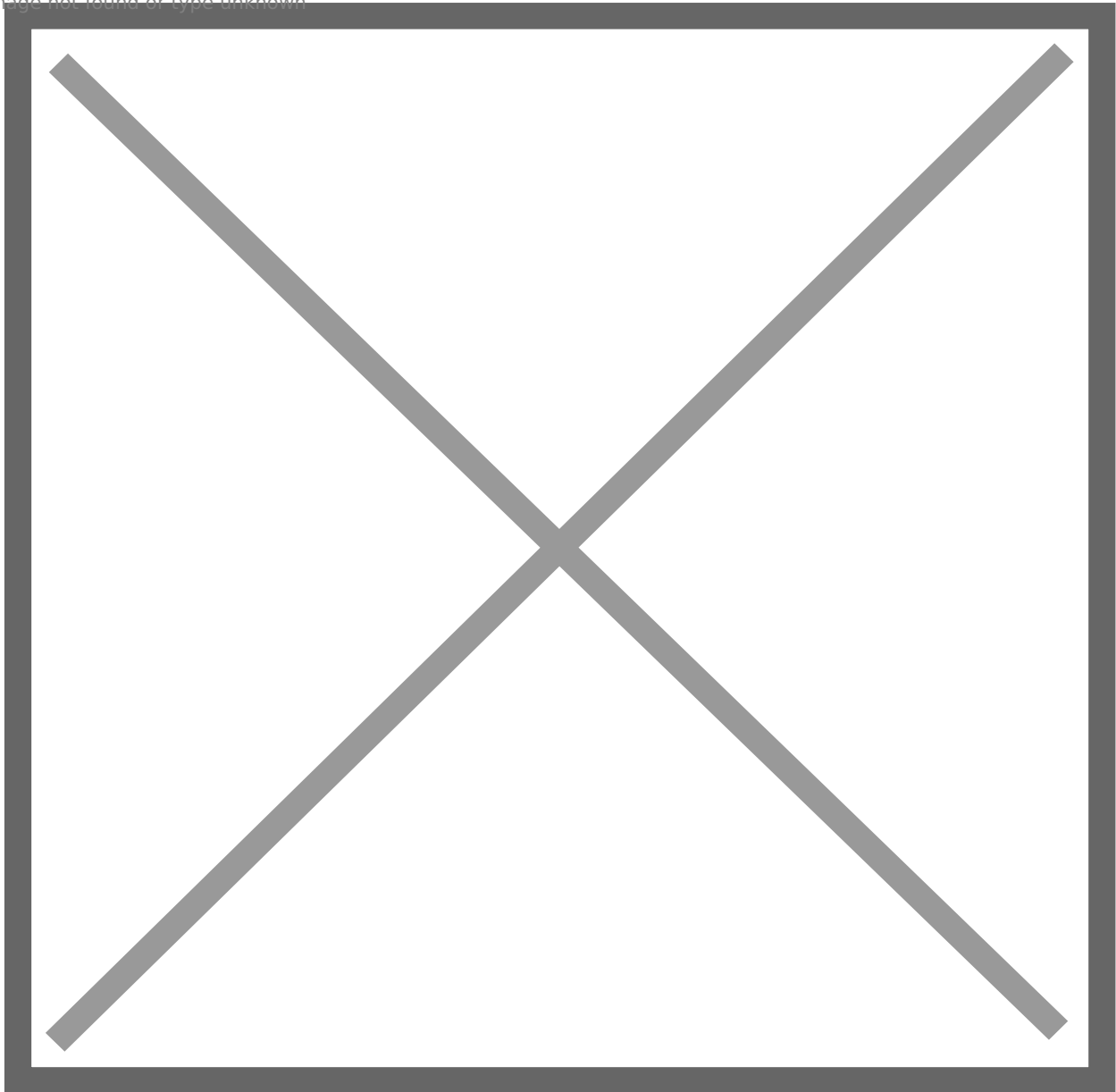
<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/52336152>

Post by “kochiekoch” of January 4, 2023 at 10:57 AM

The discussion on Canon, Reason and Nature, made me think of this old article on the difficulty religious and superstitious people have getting a firm grip on reality:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2799-episode-154-epicurus-and-his-philosophy-part-10-the-canon-reason-and-nature-01/>

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[Study: Religious and Superstitious People Struggle to Understand the Physical World](#)

People who believe in God or the supernatural don't quite understand the physical world, claims a new study from researchers at the University of Helsinki.

bigthink.com

It was one of the questions Emily Austin had in her book as to why Epicurus would recommend the study of natural science as a path to tranquility. A world run by the caprices of gods and spirits doesn't sound that tranquil. 😊