

More correct to say "Natural Science" rather than "Physics"?

Post by "Kalosyni" of July 13, 2023 at 10:34 AM

I was listening to a recording of the Torquatus section of Cicero's "On Ends" and the phrase "Natural Science" was used...which got me wondering...Why do we continue to use the word "Physics" when it seems that it should be "Natural Science"? Besides taking a major shift (for some of us) to say "Natural Science" instead of the word "Physics", it would make it much more clear if we could say that the three parts of Epicurean Philosophy consist of Natural Science, Epistemology, and Ethics. Thoughts?

Post by "Cassius" of July 13, 2023 at 10:37 AM

That's definitely another word that causes confusion. It's almost like any study of Epicurus for regular people needs to begin with an article that describes the different ways that Epicurus used terms such as -

- Gods
 - Death
 - Virtue
 - Pleasure
 - Physics / Natural Science
 - Canonics / Epistemology
- and probably many more
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Post by "Don" of July 13, 2023 at 11:13 AM

One way to keep it more in line with the text is to use "Physical Science" but that's clunky.

Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2023 at 11:19 AM

Similar problem with "natural philosophers" in this line from the letter to Menoecus. Don what did you choose as your own translation of this?

This version is Bailey from our texts section

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[134] For, indeed, it were better to follow the myths about the gods than to become a slave to the destiny of the natural philosophers: for the former suggests a hope of placating the gods by worship, whereas the latter involves a necessity which knows no placation.

Post by “Don” of July 13, 2023 at 11:50 AM

[134] Because of this, it is better to follow the stories of the gods than to be enslaved by the deterministic decrees of the old natural philosophers,...

Post by “Eikadistes” of July 13, 2023 at 1:18 PM

Technically, we as Epicureans might use "**Physiology**" as the jargon to refer to "*the study of the regular generative and destructive activities of particles throughout the void*" (as opposed to the academic definition of "*Physiology*" as "*anatomy*"). Epicurus' notion of *physiologias*, the "study of nature" seems to connote something closer to "*Biology*" and "*Chemistry*" than to "*Particle Physics*", which I think they saw as an expression of *Canonics* or *Ontology*.

As White translates in Book X of *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*: "*It is their [Epicurean] custom, however, to rank canonic[s] [κανονικὸν] along with physics [φυσικῶ]; they call it 'on standards and principles' and 'fundamentals' [στοιχειωτικόν]. Physics [φυσικὸν] they call 'on generation and perishing' and 'on nature'; and ethics [ἠθικὸν] they call 'on what to choose or avoid' and 'on ways of life and the end [τέλους].'* Dialectic [logic] they reject as a distaction,

since they think it sufficient for those studying physics to proceed according to the expressions for things" (30).

Post by "Godfrey" of July 13, 2023 at 2:00 PM

That's an illuminating translation from White! I haven't read that in a while, and hadn't read White's version.

Just for reference: [Natural science - Wikipedia](#)

Post by "Don" of July 13, 2023 at 2:25 PM

Here's Hicks on DL 10.30:

The usual arrangement, however, is to conjoin canonic with physics, and the former they call the science which deals with the standard and the first principle, or the elementary part of philosophy, while physics proper, they say, deals with becoming and perishing and with nature ; ethics, on the other hand, deals with things to be sought and avoided, with human life and with the end-in-chief.

And the text:

εἰώθασι μέντοι τὸ κανονικὸν ὁμοῦ τῷ φυσικῷ τάττειν: καλοῦσι δ' αὐτὸ περὶ κριτηρίου καὶ ἀρχῆς, καὶ στοιχειωτικόν: τὸ δὲ φυσικὸν περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς, καὶ περὶ φύσεως: τὸ δὲ ἠθικὸν περὶ αἰρετῶν καὶ φευκτῶν καὶ περὶ βίων καὶ τέλους.

Post by "Joshua" of July 13, 2023 at 2:37 PM

"Natural philosophy", at least in the English of the 19th century, did not contain just physics but also botany (Joseph Banks), biology (Charles Darwin), geology (Charles Lyell), astronomy (Edwin Hubble), anatomy and physiology (Henry Gray), and so on.

Post by “Don” of July 13, 2023 at 2:42 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

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Here's an idea of the all-encompassing connotation of φύσις

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