

On Nature, Book 28

Post by “Don” of September 18, 2023 at 7:43 AM

One of my favorite passages from Epicurus comes at the end of Book 28 of On Nature:

Quote

Nor shall I hesitate to cite repeatedly, to you and to these others, cases where there is still error of this kind among us; and so too all other cases, which are not of this kind, but which we would nevertheless consider to involve error. For the present, however, I do not wish to cite them, to avoid making a new start in a discussion which has already reached sufficient length. So let the words which we have prattled suffice for the present. And you others, try ten thousand times over to commit to memory what I and Metrodorus here have just said.

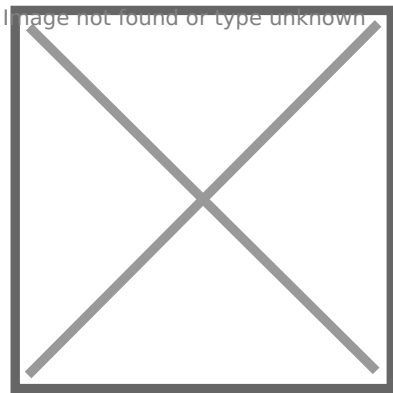
And now I think I have finished prattling to you this twenty-eighth instalment of our consecutive lecture series.

To me, it demonstrates:

- the use of frank criticism in the Garden by correcting errors "among us"
- Epicurus's sense of humor in using words that convey "prattling on"
- the use of lectures in the Garden
- the encouragement of memorizing texts
- the use of back and forth conversation to instruct, ie what I and Metrodorus here have just said

This little section packs a lot in.

Post by “Don” of September 18, 2023 at 8:23 AM



[Epicurus, On nature, book 28](#)

Epicurus, On nature, book 28

www.academia.edu

Link to make it easier to find Sedley's translation

Post by “Don” of September 18, 2023 at 8:36 AM

The verb form of this word is what Epicurus uses to describe himself:

ἀδο-λέσχης, ου, ό, (adoleskhēs)

prater, idle talker, esp. of reputed sophists: Σωκράτην, τὸν πτωχὸν ἀ. Eur. 352, cf. Ar. Nu. 1485; ἢ Πρόδικος ἢ τῶν ἀ. εἷς γέ τις Id. Fr. 490; ἀ. τις σοφιστής Pl. Plt. 299b, cf. Tht. 195b, R. 488e: generally, talker, babbler, Thphr. Char. 3.2, Arist. EN 1117b35, etc.

Post by “Bryan” of March 13, 2024 at 12:37 AM

Epicurus, On Nature 28.10.1a (Sedley reconstruction) "πραγματικῶν θεωρημάτων ἐνδίδξει καὶ τὴν μερίληψιν... τῆς δόξης... περὶ ταύτης τε τῆς εἰς τοῦτο ἐμβαλλούσης ὑπολήψεως. ὄντων δ' οὖν τοιούτων οἶον... τούτων κατὰ τὴν αἴρεσιν πραττόντων... τῆς ἐπαγωγῆς γιγνέσθω τῆς πραγματικῆς..."

Looking at that quote, which is very difficult, I wanted to revisit ἡ λήψις "reception,"

Post by “Don” of March 13, 2024 at 6:34 AM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

[Quote from Bryan](#)

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τὴν μερίληψιν (tēn merílēpsin): Part-taking, Partiality, Fragmentation

28.10.1a is SO fragmentary! Your smooth transcription somewhat obscures that. There is a LOT of missing papyrus in that column.

It also looks like Sedley has περ[ίληψι]μ where you have μερίληψιν (Sedley pi π., your mu μ.).

ously defined in the non-image-making manner, but which we altered when by some act of empirical reasoning we saw that they were not of this kind. But as for the majority of names which might have been found false by a conceptual process

α[...]ως εσ[.....

γμ[.....

Fr. 10 col. I a

1]τει ὄθ[εν

.....]χε[..]σθαι κατ[...

.....]τι[..]παντα[....

.....]μ[πραγμ[....

5 ...]να[....] ὡσπερ [..]υνα

...].τ[....π]ραγματικῶν

θε]ωρημ[άτων] ἐνδείξει καὶ

τ]ῆμ[περ[ίληψ]μ[πε[.....

τῆς δόξης[ς τ]ῆς [.].....

10 .]. τοῖς πραγ[.....

..]τ[..]σε περ[ὶ ταύτ]ης [τε] τῆς

εἰς τοῦτο ἐμ[β]αλλούσης

ὑπολήψεως. ὄντων δ' οὖν

τοιούτων οἶον [.] τούτων

15 κατὰ τὴν [αἴρ]εσιμ[πρατ]τόν-

Here's the engraving of that column from Papyri.info!



Oh my! It looks even worse when you see the papyrus itself. Getting more than a few words strung together at a time from that seems highly problematic.

Post by “Bryan” of March 13, 2024 at 11:15 AM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I am struggling with #5.

[Quote from Don](#)

Sedley has περι[ίληψ]ιμ where you have μερίληψιν (Sedley pi π., your mu μ..).

Thank you very much Don! That goes far to explain my struggle! Thank you! I have fully re-checked my transcription and found two additional errors.

LSJ gives us "*comprehension*" and "*inclusion*" for περίληψις, but I feel that "*comprehension*" is closer to the meaning of κατάληψις. That would give us this tentative list:

1. ἡ ἀντίληψις (hē antílēpsis): Opposition, "Con-ception"
2. ἡ διάληψις (hē diálēpsis): Interruption, Distinction, Dialogue
3. ἡ κατάληψις (hē katálēpsis): Comprehension, Capture, "Perception"
4. ἡ λῆψις (hē lēpsis): Taking, Seizure, Reception
5. ἡ περίληψις (hē perílēpsis): Summary, Overview, Encirclement
6. ἡ πρόληψις (hē prólēpsis): Preconception, Anticipation, Stereotype
7. ἡ ὑπόληψις (hē hypólēpsis): Assumption, Hypothesis, Underestimation

As you say, the section is shredded, Sedley does not translate any of it -- I agree that a full and coherent statement cannot be gleaned from what remains. The topic seems to be that errors in opinions manifest practical consequences.

Don, what are your thoughts on "v final, followed by a labial, without exception becomes μ ; followed by a guttural, in about 30% of cases becomes γ " (Sedley)

Post by "Don" of March 13, 2024 at 12:37 PM

Looking online at an ancient Great grammar book:

Quote from Introduction to Attic Greek

Nu is often assimilated to the following consonant in compounds or in phrases pronounced as a unit: it is assimilated to the following consonant before Λ , M, P, Σ , labialized to M before the labial plosives (B, Π , Φ), and converted to velar nasal Γ before the velar plosives (K, Γ , X)

Post by "Bryan" of March 13, 2024 at 1:40 PM

Do you suppose it would be too idiosyncratic to preserve that spelling?

Post by "Don" of March 13, 2024 at 2:08 PM

I'm betting all "rules" were fluid back then.

Post by "Bryan" of March 15, 2024 at 10:52 AM

Some further notes on Book 28

Αἱ Πλάναι: “wanderings, errors”

1. We can use common words, but it is important to recognize that those words can contain errors.
2. To avoid retaining errors in the use of common words, we must perceive each object fully and we must align the basic and original meaning of a word to that fully perceived object. *To keep from making mistakes with common words, we should really see things clearly and make sure the word's true meaning matches what we sense.*
3. Errors arise when our ideas are misaligned with our sensations (i.e., our preconceptions, perceptions, and receptions). *Mistakes happen when what we think does not fit with what we sense.*
4. As much as possible, we should identify errors in the use of words by identifying the harmful behaviors that come from the error. *We should try to spot mistakes in how words are used by looking at the harmful actions they lead to.*

Data that is empirical (ἐπιβλητικός) is derived from impressions (φαντασίαι) that we perceive clearly through the focus (ἐπιβολαί) of our faculties (κριτήρια). These faculties are the [1] sense-organs (αἰσθητήρια) which we use to focus on something clear (τι ἐναργές), and the [2] intellect (διάνοια), which we use to focus on the clear thought of the subject (τὴν ἐναργῆ τοῦ πράγματος ἐπίνοιαν).

Post by “Bryan” of March 16, 2024 at 11:25 PM

(Epicurus - On Nature - Book 28, P.Herc. 1479 col. 1) ἰδιοτήτος τῷ σοφῷ καὶ μὴ σοφῷ διε[φώ]νεις, οὐδέμ παρε[μ-]βάλλων [τοῦ π]ερὶ τῶν οὐκ ἐπιμαρτυρήσεων κα[ὶ] ἀντιμαρτυρήσεων. ἐτίθεις δ[έ] τινα τῶν ὀνομάτων εὐθὺς διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς λέξεως, καὶ τὴν κατ' αὐτὰς τὰς αἰσθήσεις πλάνην τῶν πολ[λῶ]ν ἀπο[σ]ημαίνων, οὐ μό[νον] τὴν ἔν[νοιαν] .

(Sedley trans, "fr. 11, col. 2") In your search for verbal individuality you were in conflict [as much] with the wise man as with the unwise, by including nothing about lack of confirmatory evidence and the presence of counter-evidence. You fixed some of your vocabulary directly with the same language, also representing the error of most men with regard to what they actually perceive...

Epicurean Epistemological Terms:

1. Confirmation (ἡ ἐπιμαρτύρησις): Affirmative evidence. The evidence that supports or validates a specific claim or hypothesis; crucial for establishing truth or credibility.
2. Non-confirmation (ἡ οὐκ ἐπιμαρτύρησις): Lack of affirmative evidence. The absence of evidence to affirm or support a claim; important in scenarios where a statement or hypothesis cannot be substantiated. Disproves an idea about the perceptible.
3. Contradiction (ἡ ἀντιμαρτύρησις): Counter-evidence. The presentation of evidence that directly opposes or refutes a given claim or hypothesis, playing a key role in dialectical and critical discourse to test and challenge assertions. Disproves an idea about the imperceptible.
4. Non-contradiction (ἡ μὴ ἀντιμαρτύρησις): Lack of counter-evidence. The situation where no evidence exists that contradicts a claim, often leading to its tacit acceptance or the lack of opposition in argumentative processes.
5. Error (τὸ διημαρτημένον): The error or misalignment of terms. Always comes from the intrusion of opinion when a fact awaits [1] confirmation or [4] the absence of contradiction and then is [2] not confirmed or [3] contradicted.

Post by “Don” of March 16, 2024 at 11:51 PM

Thanks, Bryan.

No great insights here from me tonight, but just linguistic trivia:

ἰδιοτήτος idiotetos > which is related to where English gets the word "idiot" meant in Ancient Greek more like - as Bryan notes from Sedley - individuality or being apart from the masses, a private person, one not engaged in public affairs. One who wasn't engaged in public affairs was an ἰδιώτης idiotes. It could also be used patronizingly for "ignorant person," from idios "one's own"

ἐπιμαρτυρήσεων and the rest > epi-martyreseon > note the root "martyr" in the Greek. That's the same word used for the Christians killed "for their faith" (debatable, but I'll let it slide). They were "witnesses" to their religion, they showed others how their religion made them act - even unto death. So, that idea of providing evidence is intrinsic to the Greek words with the root - martyr-, then you add on the prefixes and change the meaning.

Language is fun 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of March 17, 2024 at 2:14 AM

In case it's of use, these epistemological terms also feature in Philodemus' *On Signs*. There are hints as well in [PD24](#), and in the Letter to Herodotus 10.39-40. And Long and Sedley discuss them in *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Volume 1, in their commentary in the Epistemology section. I'm sure that they can be spotted elsewhere, if one is looking for them.

Post by “Bryan” of March 17, 2024 at 1:31 PM

Excellent points about idiosyncratic idiots and honest martyrs!

Godfrey, absolutely! In a way this is my preparation for revisiting the rather difficult *On Signs*.

Don, regarding ἡ ἐπιμαρτύρησις et al., I know we have -ησις as a general suffix to form abstract nouns. But I feel that ἡ ῥῆσις "saying" "manner of speaking" must also be part of the construction. I cannot quite tell right now if this is obviously there or if I am forcing it.

Post by “Don” of March 17, 2024 at 2:07 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

Don, regarding ἡ ἐπιμαρτύρησις et al., I know we have -ησις as a general suffix to form abstract nouns. But I feel that ἡ ῥῆσις "saying" "manner of speaking" must also be part of the construction. I cannot quite tell right now if this is obviously there or if I am forcing it.

I could see that, but then ῥῆσις has the -σις abstract suffix. I think the -σις is just doing the work of "nouncing" (to coin a clunky word) the μαρτυρέω.

ῥῆσις: Etymology From stem ῥη- of εἶρω (eírō, “to say”) + -σις (-sis, abstract noun suffix).

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

Derived terms:

ἀντιμαρτυρέω (antimarturēō)

ἀπομαρτυρέω (apomarturēō)

διᾶμαρτύρέω (diamarturéō)
εἰσμαρτύρέω (eismarturéō)
ἐκμαρτύρέω (ekmarturéō)
ἐπιμαρτύρέω (epimarturéō)
κατάμαρτύρέω (katamarturéō)
προσμαρτύρέω (prosmarturéō)
σὺμμαρτύρέω (summarturéō)
ὑπομαρτύρέω (hupomarturéō)
ψευδομαρτύρέω (pseudomarturéō)

Post by “Don” of March 17, 2024 at 4:05 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

Godfrey, absolutely! In a way this is my preparation for revisiting the rather difficult On Signs.

That text has been on my list for too long. Maybe your revisitation will spur me to try digging into it.

Post by “Cassius” of March 17, 2024 at 5:43 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Maybe your revisitation will spur me to try digging into it.

A result much to be desired!

I think that we've made some progress in bringing out the importance of the "logical sparring" between Epicureans and the Stoics/Platonists, but there's much more to do. Philodemus' "On Signs" is an important part of what remains so we can dig further into the canonics.

The caution I think anyone tackling this needs to remember is that the authorities seem to agree that the opening material that survives is not discussing the Epicurean viewpoint but the Stoic viewpoint, so if you don't know from the beginning which is which, then it can be super

confusing to figure out what is arguing for and what is being arguing against.

And you have the central issue "contraposition" which needs an explanation before you can get very far as well.

But there's a lot of good background in Sedley's articles and in the appendices to the DeLacy book "On Methods of Inference" (even though they don't always agree with each other).

Post by “Don” of March 17, 2024 at 5:53 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Sedley's articles and in the appendices to the DeLacy book "On Methods of Inference"

[Cassius](#) : Are those all linked somewhere on the forum site here?

Post by “Cassius” of March 17, 2024 at 6:58 PM

Good question. I will make sure that they are and link back here.

Looks like the Answer is yes.

Here is the main forum link and I will be sure both are linked within that one. I don't think we have the 1970's update to the DeLacey book however!

[Philodemus On Methods of Inference](#)

And yes this thread contains the key links, thanks in large part to your former self:

Thread

["On Methods of Inference": Notes For Review And Discussion \(Including David Sedley Article: "On Signs"\)](#)

[EDIT BY CASSIUS: [Here](#) is a link to the [DeLacey Translation](#) including the [DeLacy Appendix](#) which gives a lot of background on the epistemology issues.]

(Note: these are my personal notes. Not all of these notes are from the book; some are from Google to help me further understand the basic ideas, and some are my "notes to self".)

Signs: what you see or what you think about

"All instruction is either about things or about signs; but things are learnt by means of signs. I now use the word "thing"...



Godfrey

August 26, 2021 at 1:51 AM

Post by "Bryan" of March 20, 2024 at 2:41 AM

1. **Divine Origin Theory.** Words are given to humans directly by a divine entity or through a supernatural act.
2. **Intentionalist Theory:** Word meanings are shaped by what the individual speaker intends to communicate, regardless of conventional language norms.
3. **Constructivist Theory:** Words are a constructed tool, deliberately invented and developed by humans to meet their communication needs.
4. **Conventionalist Theory:** Words are products of social conventions and agreements among members of a language community over time.
5. **Naturalist Theory:** Words have a natural basis. Humans, like other animals, naturally produce specific sounds in response to specific circumstances, leading to a natural foundation for each language. While cultural and social factors have influenced language development, there is a core link between words and their meanings that is rooted in human nature.

Epicurus and Metrodorus originally took a fully conventionalist view of language. By 296 BC, (when *On Nature*, Book 28 was written) Epicurus came to see that humans naturally created relationships between objects and words, just as animals naturally create a relationship between their circumstances and their vocalizations. Therefore, language is not purely conventional. There is, for any group of people in any environment, a natural connection between their words and the objects that they label.