

Episode 243 Cicero's OTNOTG 18 - From "All Sensations Are True" to Reasoning By Similarity And Analogy

Post by "Cassius" of August 23, 2024 at 9:34 AM

Welcome to Episode 243 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we 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 we have a thread to discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

Today we are continuing to review Cicero's "On the Nature of The Gods," which began with the Epicurean spokesman Velleius defending the Epicurean point of view. This week will continue into Section 26 as Cotta, the Academic Skeptic, responds to Velleius, and we - in turn - will respond to Cotta in particular and the Skeptical argument in general.

For the main text we are using primarily the [Yonge translation, available here at Archive.org](#). The text which we include in these posts is available [here](#). We will also refer to the public domain version of the Loeb series, which contains both Latin and English, [as translated by H. Rackham](#).

Additional versions can be found here:

- [Frances Brooks 1896 translation at Online Library of Liberty](#)
- [Lacus Curtius Edition \(Rackham\)](#)
- [PDF Of Loeb Edition at Archive.org by Rackham](#)
- [Gutenberg.org version by CD Yonge](#)

A list of arguments presented [will eventually be put together here](#).

Today's Text

XXVI. It seems an unaccountable thing how one soothsayer can refrain from laughing when he sees another. It is yet a greater wonder that you can refrain from laughing among yourselves. It is no body, but something like body! I could understand this if it were applied to statues made of wax or clay; but in regard to the Deity, I am not able to discover what is meant by a quasi-

body or quasi-blood. Nor indeed are you, Velleius, though you will not confess so much. For those precepts are delivered to you as dictates which Epicurus carelessly blundered out; for he boasted, as we see in his writings, that he had no instructor, which I could easily believe without his public declaration of it, for the same reason that I could believe the master of a very bad edifice if he were to boast that he had no architect but himself: for there is nothing of the Academy, nothing of the Lyceum, in his doctrine; nothing but puerilities. He might have been a pupil of Xenocrates. O ye immortal Gods, what a teacher was he! And there are those who believe that he actually was his pupil; but he says otherwise, and I shall give more credit to his word than to another's. He confesses that he was a pupil of a certain disciple of Plato, one Pamphilus, at Samos; for he lived there when he was young, with his father and his brothers. His father, Neocles, was a farmer in those parts; but as the farm, I suppose, was not sufficient to maintain him, he turned school-master; yet Epicurus treats this Platonic philosopher with wonderful contempt, so fearful was he that it should be thought he had ever had any instruction. But it is well known he had been a pupil of Nausiphanes, the follower of Democritus; and since he could not deny it, he loaded him with insults in abundance. If he never heard a lecture on these Democritean principles, what lectures did he ever hear? What is there in Epicurus's physics that is not taken from Democritus? For though he altered some things, as what I mentioned before of the oblique motions of the atoms, yet most of his doctrines are the same; his atoms—his vacuum—his images—infinity of space—innumerable worlds, their rise and decay—and almost every part of natural learning that he treats of.

Now, do you understand what is meant by quasi-body and quasi-blood? For I not only acknowledge that you are a better judge of it than I am, but I can bear it without envy. If any sentiments, indeed, are communicated without obscurity, what is there that Velleius can understand and Cotta not? I know what body is, and what blood is; but I cannot possibly find out the meaning of quasi-body and quasi-blood. Not that you intentionally conceal your principles from me, as Pythagoras did his from those who were not his disciples; or that you are intentionally obscure, like Heraclitus. But the truth is (which I may venture to say in this company), you do not understand them yourself.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/61189299>

Post by “Cassius” of August 23, 2024 at 9:35 AM

In this episode we will start by revisiting the remarks made last week as to "[all sensations are true](#)," and we will add in an article that Godfrey just pointed us to:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4005-episode-243-cicero-s-otnotg-18-from-all-sensations-are-true-to-reasoning-by-simi/>

Thread

[David Sedley's "Epicurean Theories of Knowledge From Hermarchus To Lucretius And Philodemus"](#)

Thanks to Godfrey for this link:

<https://www.academia.edu/43841650/Epicu...card=view-paper>

I note that it contains reference to something we've mentioned briefly lately, Epicurean criticism of Democritus and others who tended toward skepticism: epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/4968/



Cassius

August 22, 2024 at 4:48 PM

If we have time after that, we'll proceed into Section 26 and apply what we've been discussing.

Post by "Cassius" of August 24, 2024 at 11:46 AM

Four Points From Sedley Article: "Epicurean Theories Of Knowledge"

(Posting these following excerpts (quotes except for the headings) mainly as a summary of points we may want to include in Episode 243 before proceeding with more text).

Note:

During the 260s BC Arcesilaus succeeded to the headship of the Academy, and under his influence the formerly doctrinal Platonist school veered away from dogma, instead adopting towards rival schools an essentially critical, dialectical stance. It seems to have been during that early phase of the sceptical New Academy that Colotes, who had been an intimate of Epicurus, wrote his treatise entitled The impossibility of life itself according to other philosophers (meaning, of course, other than Epicurus), about whose content we learn from Plutarch's polemical counterblast in his own Against Colotes. None of Colotes' chosen targets –

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4005-episode-243-cicero-s-otnotg-18-from-all-sensations-are-true-to-reasoning-by-simi/>

Democritus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Socrates, Melissus, Plato, Stilpo, the Cyrenaics and Arcesilaus – were criticised for their ethical positions, as one might have predicted, but entirely for the support that their epistemology and metaphysics allegedly lent to scepticism, and specifically, to scepticism about human cognitive access to physical reality. 7 The last target attacked by Colotes, though anonymous, is unerringly recognized by Plutarch as the New Academy of Arcesilaus, presented as advocating universal suspension of judgement (ἐποχή). Yet, intriguingly, there is reason to think that the treatise was composed, not in the vicinity of the Athenian Academy, but in Alexandria. This much is suggested by its opening dedication to Ptolemy II (Plutarch., Adv. Col., 1107E), and by a flattering peroration in which the Alexandrian king was warned against the dangers to law and order posed by the ruinous non-Epicurean philosophies listed (1124C). We should infer that the felt need for Epicureans to counterattack Academic scepticism was not just an Athenian preoccupation but was spreading to the courts of major Hellenized cultural centres, where the patronage of the local dynasty might well be hotly competed for.

Point 1 - Ontological Arguments Are Not Determinative

Text: Or do you think, on the basis of the foregoing argument, that someone would not suffer the troubles which I mention but rather would make it convincing that fair, foul and all other matters of belief are falsely believed in, just because unlike gold and similar things they are not the same everywhere? After all, it must stare everybody in the face that bigger and smaller are also not perceived the same everywhere and in relation to all magnitudes [...] So too with heavier and lighter. And the same applies also to other powers, without exception. For neither are the same things healthy for everybody, nor nourishing or fatal, nor the opposites of these, but the very same things are healthy and nourishing for some yet have the opposite effect on others. Therefore either they must say that these too are false – things whose effects are plain for everyone to see – or else they must refuse to brazen it out and to battle against what is evident, and not abolish fair and foul as falsely believed in either, just because unlike stone and gold they are not the same for everybody [...] Relative predicates do not have the same status as things said not relatively but in accordance with something's own nature. Nor does the one kind truly exist but the other not. So to expect them to have the same attributes, or the one kind to exist but the other not, is naive. And there is no difference between starting from these and eliminating those and starting from those and eliminating these: it would be similarly naive to think that since the bigger and heavier and whiter and sweeter are bigger than one thing but smaller than another, and heavier, and likewise with the other attributes, and since nothing has the same one of these attributes per se as it has in relation to something else, in the same way stone, gold and the like ought also, if they truly existed, likewise to be gold in relation to one person while having the opposite nature in relation to another; and to say that, since that is not the case, these things are falsely believed in and do not really exist (On irrational contempt, XXIII, 26- XXVI, 23). 9

1. The opponents can be seen to draw heavily on Platonic dialectical materials in order to launch their attack on the reality of values, in particular in their contrast between the universally agreed determinate nature exhibited by minerals and the cultural relativity of values. As one might expect of the New Academy, this sceptical argument borrows its materials freely from the text of Plato (Phaedrus, 263a, cf. also Euthyphro, 7b-d, Theaetetus, 172b). More remarkable is how Polystratus, in his reply, appears himself to draw inspiration from Plato - a strategy with all the more ad hominem force when directed against Plato's own self-declared successors. Plato had indeed never intended by this contrast between minerals and values to impugn the reality of the latter, any more than he had meant to infer from the relativity of large(r) and small(er) to their unreality. On the contrary, at Sophist 255c he had presented an exhaustive division of beings (ὄντα) into absolute and relative, a bicategorical scheme which became formal Academic doctrine under his second successor Xenocrates (F15 Isnardi Parente 2). Much the same stance as Plato's own is developed by Polystratus as a rebuttal of the contemporary Academy. He resourcefully points out that the mere existence of an ontological difference between the two categories does not entail that one or other of them will fall short of reality. Anyone who thinks otherwise, he ingeniously adds, could as easily argue that, since such relative predicates as beneficial and harmful manifestly are part of the structure of reality, it must be the non-relative items such as minerals that are unreal!

Point 2 - "Seeing Double" Does Not Constitute Proof of the Falseness of Sensation

A further attempted innovation likely to have been motivated by the challenge of Academic scepticism is attributable to the Rhodian Epicurean Timasagoras. We have already encountered one of his two recorded innovations to the school's doctrine of vision. The other, noted by Cicero (Lucullus, 80) in his defence of the New Academy's scepticism, concerns the case of seeing double. To judge from the Ciceronian context, the debate ran more or less as follows.

1. Epicurus insists on the truth of all sense-perceptions. If a single case of a false sense-perception were found, trust in the senses would collapse. But in fact the eye simply registers with unfailing accuracy the visual data reaching it. In all alleged cases of optical illusion the error lies in the mind's misinterpretation or over-interpretation of those visual data.
2. Critics from the New Academy respond with the counterexample of an eye squeezed out of shape and as a result falsely seeing the single flame in a lamp as two flames. Here what appear to the eye are the visual data, but not in the form in which they first reached it. How can the Epicureans say that the appearance is 'true', when it is not even true to those visual data?
3. Timasagoras replies on behalf of the Epicureans that never, when he has squeezed his eye while looking at a lamp, have there appeared to him to be two flames. This supports

the Epicurean thesis that falsehood is always located in the added opinion, not in the eyes themselves.

In stage (3), does Timasagoras mean (a) that in the situation described the bare visual appearance has never even momentarily looked to him like two flames? Or (b) that he has never been misled into thinking that there actually were two flames? Cicero seems to understand the latter. But on either understanding Timasagoras' reply would be meant to disqualify the Academic example from counting as a genuine optical illusion at all, and thereby to block it from being used as the single counterexample that Epicurus in stage (1) conceded would suffice to destroy his most fundamental epistemological doctrine.

Point 3 - The "Fourth" Criterion Of Truth (the "power of intellectual vision" may be important but does it constitute a criteria of truth?)

The first three criteria listed in this passage – sense-perceptions (aistheseis), preconceptions (prolepseis) and feelings (pathe) – are commonplace both in Epicurus' own writings and in those of subsequent Epicurean generations. Curiously, however, the fourth item listed, phantastikai epibolai tes dianoiias, is likewise at least twice appealed to by Epicurus (Hrdt., 38, RS, XXIV) as if it were another of his criteria of truth. We may therefore take the school's reported innovation to consist in nothing more than making its criterial status explicit. It is unknown why Epicurus did not himself formally do so in the Kanon, his now lost work on the criteria of truth. It was a work of (in at least two senses!) canonical status, upon which the school reverentially bestowed the extravagant-sounding epithet 'heaven-sent' (Cic., ND, I, 43, Plutarch., Adv. Col., 1118A). Hence, it seems, even a small departure from it had to be acknowledged and, no doubt, justified.

Be that as it may, it seems that one credible motive for the elevation of phantastikai epibolai tes dianoiias to official criterial status by Epicurus' followers was that the expression was felt by them to capture, better than any other, the nature of Epicurus' own greatest cognitive gift to mankind. As Cicero's Epicurean spokesman Velleius explains, Epicurus' godlike superiority lay above all in his powers of intellectual vision:

For the same man who taught us everything else taught us also that the world was made by nature without the need for craftsmanship, and that this thing which you call impossible without divine creativity is in fact so easy that nature will make, is making and has made infinitely many worlds. Just because you [the Stoic Balbus] do not see how nature can do this without a mind, unable to develop your plot's dénouement you copy the tragic poets and resort to a god. You would not be demanding this god's handiwork if you saw the measureless magnitude of space, endless in all directions, into which the mind, projecting and concentrating itself (in quam se iniciens animus et intendens), travels far and wide, seeing as a result no boundary of its extremities at which it could call a halt. In this measureless stretch of widths, lengths and

heights there flies an infinite mass of countless atoms, which despite the presence of void between them stick together and by taking hold of each other form a continuous whole. And from these are made those shapes and formations of things which you think are impossible without bellows and anvil. With this thought you have placed as a yoke upon our necks a permanent overlord, for us to fear day and night [...] Freed from these terrors by Epicurus, and delivered into freedom, we do not fear those whom we understand neither to bring trouble upon themselves nor to try and make trouble for others, and with holy reverence we worship their supremely fine nature (ND, I, 53-54, 56).

Velleius thus brings out what Epicureans can achieve for themselves if they follow Epicurus on his odyssey of the mind, and thus come to appreciate the inevitability that mere atomic accident, operating as it must do on an infinite scale, will produce worlds like our own, without the need for divine craftsmanship. That in its turn requires them to see, by mental projection, what the universe's infinity really means.

Point 4 - Sign-Inferences (Whenever Signs Are Indeed Useful, It Is Because Their Truth Is Established By The Senses)

Arguably the most important contribution to the history of philosophy to emerge from the wreckage of Philodemus' library is to be found in his own treatise On sign-inferences. 15 Seemingly intended for school use rather than for publication, it is his record of an otherwise quite unknown debate about scientific method that is likely to have taken place around the beginning of the 1st century BC, in Athens. In it Philodemus summarizes (down to XXVII, 28), both from his own lecture notes and from those of his fellow-student Bromius, how their teacher Zeno of Sidon, and likewise the eminent contemporary Epicurean Demetrius of Laconia (XXVIII, 13- XXIX, 16), had defended their own shared theory of scientific inference against opponents who denied its validity. This favoured Epicurean method is the 'similarity method' (ὁ καθ' ὁμοιότητα τρόπος), while the opponents advocate instead the deductive 'elimination method' (ὁ κατ' ἀνασκειὴν τρόπος, or just ἀνασκειή, 'elimination', for short). These opponents are almost certainly Stoics. If in the early years of the first century BCE it is the epistemological challenge posed by another doctrinal school, rather than the rapidly weakening scepticism of the New Academy, 16 that now occupies the Epicureans' main attention, that is very much a sign of the times.

The similarity method is itself subdivided into two species. The first is based on direct similarity, as is well exemplified (though not exhausted) by inductive inference, the standard example being inference from the exceptionless mortality of human beings in our experience to the universal mortality of all human beings, including those outside our experience. The second species is based on analogical rather than direct similarity, the analogy normally taking the form of an inference from the macroscopic to the microscopic. For instance, since macroscopic

motion depends on empty space, motion at the microscopic level of atoms also does so. Both species of the method constitute Epicurean procedures for the use of 'signs' – that is, for the scientific discovery of unobserved truths by inference from the directly observable evidence.

It should be clear that the analogical use of the method formally encodes what had always been, at least in outline, a primary Epicurean procedure for investigating the unobservable realm of atoms and void. The stock example noted above, the inference from motion to void, corresponds to the very first inference of the physics we meet in Epicurus' epitome the Letter to Herodotus (40). It is less immediately obvious why the inductive use of the method should be equally important to Epicureans, but the following is a likely motive. In Cicero's *De natura deorum* the account of Epicurean theology, probably itself derived from a work by Zeno of Sidon, includes a consensus omnium argument for the existence of gods (I, 43), starting from the premise that all human races have the prolepsis of gods. Whether this argument was already used by Epicurus himself can be disputed, but its use in the school by the time Philodemus studied there should not be in doubt. To defend the soundness of its main premise, that all human races have a prolepsis of gods, would have required arguing, by appeal to the similarity method, from the attested religious conceptions of known races to the unattested religious conceptions attributable to unknown races. This may well be among the contexts in which the inductive version of the 'similarity method' was first fully formulated and defended.

It seems likely, in addition, that its formulation and defence were a response to the Stoic critics. This is because the critics, as reported by Philodemus, deny the formal validity of such 'similarity' inferences – thus incidentally anticipating the Humean problem of induction – and insist instead that the only valid inferences from observed sign to unobserved significate are those that respect the 'elimination' criterion: that if the significate is 'eliminated', i.e. taken to be false (in the case of a proposition) or non-existent (in the case of a state of affairs), then the sign is, simply thereby, 'co-eliminated'. And this seems to be an adaptation to sign-inferences of the favoured Stoic criterion of conditional entailment known as *synartesis*: that the negation of the consequent in a conditional should 'conflict' with the antecedent. In the terminology of this debate, signs differ from conditionals only to the extent that their standard formulation, instead of the conditional

'If p, q', is 'Since p, q', the latter being what Stoics would call a 'paraconditional' (*παρασυνημμένον*), equivalent to 'If p, q; and p'.

Remarkably, the Epicurean side in the debate seems fully prepared to accept this fundamentally a priori 'elimination' criterion as correct, and to retain it alongside the 'similarity' criterion rejected by the Stoics. The Epicurean strategy is not to reject the Stoic inferential criterion but to minimize its role in sign-inference. The Stoic quest for a purely deductive scientific method is doomed to failure, they allege, since even the a priori elimination method cannot avoid relying on premises established by the empirical similarity method.

True, the Epicureans say, the sign-inference “Since there is motion there is void” goes through trivially by the elimination method, because according to them if void is eliminated, motion is thereby co-eliminated. But that natural and universal generalization about motion is one that we have learnt in the first place by empirical generalization over a vast range of experiences, where without exception motion is observed to take place only where there is room for it to do so.

This Epicurean strategy exhibits the empiricism that had always been the school’s epistemological hallmark, and which is here taken to underwrite all necessary truths: even apparently a priori truths are in reality generalizations from experience. Thus the same inductive methodology is pushed even into the realm of mathematics: from the fact that every 4x4 square in our world has an area numerically equal to its perimeter, we may correctly infer that the same is true of 4x4 squares in all other worlds too (Philodemus, *On sign-inferences*, XV, 28-XVI, 1).

If induction sounds like a bizarre way to establish the facts of mathematics, it should seem less so when we note that its key criterion is that of inconceivability. The basic format of a similarity inference is “Since x is F, y is F”, the justification being that y is so similar to x in nature as to make it inconceivable that y should lack an essential predicate of x. Thus it is ‘inconceivable’ (XV, 37-38) that, while all 4x4 squares in our world have a certain property, 4x4 squares in other worlds should lack that property. To generalize, if two or more things are sufficiently similar in their nature, it is inconceivable that they should differ in some essential property. And this applies without distinction to mathematical and to (for instance) biological generalizations:

[...] for instance, “If Plato is a man, Socrates is a man too.” For given that this is true, “If Socrates is not a man, Plato is not a man either” comes out true as well, not because by the elimination of Socrates Plato is co-eliminated, but because it is impossible to conceive of Socrates not being a man but Plato being a man. And that belongs to the similarity method (*On sign-inferences*, XII, 19-31).

The ultimate justification for this approach seems to lie in an Epicurean brand of essentialism, expressed by what we may call the ‘qua operator’, which is captured in Philodemus’ Greek by a range of subtly different terms translatable as ‘in so far as’, ‘in that’, etc.:

Those who attack sign-inference by similarity do not notice the difference between the aforementioned [senses of ‘in so far as’ etc.], and how we establish the ‘in so far as’ premise, such as, for instance, that man in so far as he is man is mortal. [...] For we establish the necessary connection of one thing with another thing from the very fact that it has been an observed concomitant of all the instances which we have encountered, especially as we have met a variety of animals belonging to the same type which while differing from each other in all other respects all share such-and- such common characteristics. Thus we say that man, in so far as and in that he is man, is mortal, because we have encountered a wide variety of men without ever finding any variation in this respect, or anything that draws us towards the

opposite view. So this is the method on which the establishment of the premise rests, both for this issue and for the others in which we apply the 'in so far as' and 'in that' construction - the peculiar connection being indicated by the fact that the one thing is the inseparable and necessary concomitant of the other.

The same is not true in the case of what is established merely by the elimination of a sign. But even in these cases, it is the fact that all the instances which we have encountered have this as their concomitant that does the job of confirmation. For it is from the fact that all familiar moving objects, while having other differences, have it in common that their motion is through empty spaces, that we conclude the same to be without exception true also at the microscopic level. And our reason for contending that if there is not, or has not been, fire, smoke should be eliminated, is that smoke has been seen in all cases without exception to be a secretion from fire (On sign-inferences, XXXIV, 29-XXXVI, 7).

In case it should be suspected that Epicurus' own favoured inferential principle, appeal to the 'lack of counterevidence' (οὐκ ἀντιμαρτύρησις), has simply been replaced by this newly evolved methodology, we should note that it retains a significant role, not only in the above passage, but also in its immediate sequel:

Another error which they make is in not noticing our procedure of establishing that no obstacle arises through things evident. For the existence of chance and of that atoms: it is necessary to show in addition that nothing else self-evident conflicts with the thesis 17 (On sign-inferences, XXXVI, 7-17).

Here, two centuries after his formulation of it, Epicurus' own scientific methodology is visibly being honoured and maintained by his successors in the school he founded. True, the pressure to compete in current far more sophisticated debates about the justification of scientific inference has unmistakably relegated that original methodology to a subordinate role. But it is important to recognize that the ultimate aim of the updated competitive strategy is nevertheless that of committed loyalists. It is the goal of vindicating - and by no means of modifying - Epicurus' proprietary doctrinal positions. The most striking case of this, well attested in On sign- inferences and elsewhere, is Epicurus' much-derided thesis that the sun, far from being larger than the earth as the astronomers maintain, is actually just as small as it appears. 18 As we learn from Philodemus (On sign- inferences, IX, 18-XI, 9), Zeno of Sidon faithfully defended this thesis against Stoic attacks. 19 And in doing so he brought to bear the full Epicurean armory developed in the debate we have been witnessing.

Post by "Joshua" of August 25, 2024 at 9:02 AM

In [this](#) article, Tim O'Keefe argues that the quasi-body and quasi-blood of the gods is evidence for the Idealist view.

[Here](#), Hegel is incomprehensible on the same subject.

And Dewitt, on page 261, is atypically cautious;

Quote

It is not on record whether Epicurus adduced logical grounds for denying flesh and blood to the bodies of the gods. We are informed that he wrote of them as having "a sort of blood and a sort of body, lacking solidity such as characterizes ordinary bodies." It is quite possible that he was rationalizing a tradition, represented by Homer, who also denied blood to the bodies of the gods. Instead of blood there was in their veins a liquid called ichor, which in later Greek signified the straw-colored residue of blood called serum. As for the unsubstantial nature of the divine body, this was only what the general belief of the Greeks assumed to be true. As already mentioned, Epicurus preferred to follow tradition where permissible and was not bent upon introducing new gods, which was an indictable offense, but aimed rather to rationalize existing beliefs and recall his countrymen to true piety.

Post by "Cassius" of August 27, 2024 at 3:29 PM

As we prepare this week's recording for broadcast it looks like I may need to do some particular slicing in regard to the time we spent on David Sedley's "Point 1" as to Ontological argument in the post immediately above. The argument apparently revolves around the alleged differences between two classes, which appear to be (1) a class that includes "relative terms" vs (2) a class that includes gold and stones.

Apparently the difference between these two classes was being used by the Skeptics to argue that the senses are not real, but Sedley says that the Epicurean was able to turn the argument on its head and use it to show that the argument could just as well prove the reverse.

What is not so clear to me is which class the skeptics were saying was "real," and why. Seems I have read that Plato held that the "idea" of a horse is real, but individual horses 10 feet in front of us we can't be sure of. It therefore may be that the Skeptics were arguing that the relative terms are real, but the gold and stone or not. And in particular, there is something going on about how people perceive the same thing differently under different circumstances. But what's not clear on quick reading is whether what is being perceived differently are the relative terms

or the solid objects. And it's even less clear how the argument could be turned on its head to show allegedly the opposite position. But then maybe the reason it's not clear has something to do with how the argument can be used for either side of the question.

If anyone has time to look at this part of the article and attempt to place the argument in simpler terms that would be great. I intend to take a look at this over the next several days to be sure that the podcast discussion that we release doesn't conflict with our best reading of this fairly tricky subject.

Post by “Cassius” of August 27, 2024 at 3:43 PM

Here is the part of Dr. Sedley's commentary that appears right after the quote that is included under "Part 1" in the post above. Explaining or giving examples of the the last underlined sentence below (especially as to "relative predicates") would be particularly helpful.

Quote

The opponents can be seen to draw heavily on Platonic dialectical materials in order to launch their attack on the reality of values, in particular in their contrast between the universally agreed determinate nature exhibited by minerals and the cultural relativity of values. As one might expect of the New Academy, this sceptical argument borrows its materials freely from the text of Plato (Phaedrus, 263a, cf. also Euthyphro, 7b-d, Theaetetus, 172b). More remarkable is how Polystratus, in his reply, appears himself to draw inspiration from Plato - a strategy with all the more ad hominem force when directed against Plato's own self-declared successors. Plato had indeed never intended by this contrast between minerals and values to impugn the reality of the latter, any more than he had meant to infer from the relativity of large(r) and small(er) to their unreality. On the contrary, at Sophist 255c he had presented an exhaustive division of beings (ὄντα) into absolute and relative, a bicategorical scheme which became formal Academic doctrine under his second successor Xenocrates (F15 Isnardi Parente 2). Much the same stance as Plato's own is developed by Polystratus as a rebuttal of the contemporary Academy. He resourcefully points out that the mere existence of an ontological difference between the two categories does not entail that one or other of them will fall short of reality. Anyone who thinks otherwise, he ingeniously adds, could as easily argue that, since such relative predicates as beneficial and harmful manifestly are part of the structure of reality, it must be the non-relative items such as minerals that are unreal!

Post by "Godfrey" of August 27, 2024 at 7:27 PM

Polystratus is saying, I think, that it makes no sense to say that either relative or non-relative is exclusively "real," for if that is the case then even something as obviously real as minerals has to be unreal. At least that's how I read what's presented here.

I'm a little surprised by that, because I would think that his position would be that "larger" and "smaller" would just be "events," and therefore not real. At least they would not be material; he seems to be saying that an event is real, even if not material. Didn't Lucretius have something to say about that? The details don't come to mind at the moment. Perhaps an event is real in the same sense that the dreams of madmen are real?

Post by "Cassius" of August 27, 2024 at 9:30 PM

Thanks Godfrey! I think pulling these sentences out goes in the same direction. If these stand alone:

Quote

Relative predicates do not have the same status as things said not relatively but in accordance with something's own nature. Nor does the one kind truly exist but the other not. So to expect them to have the same attributes, or the one kind to exist but the other not, is naive.

... even that is pretty confusing to me but "things said not relatively but in accord with something's own nature" must refer to "gold" and "stone" or such otherwise "real objects" (presumably?)

And I think you are right on point here too, and the "surprise" you mention is why this is so important -- "events" DO seem to be being given the same status of significance to us as "material objects":

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I'm a little surprised by that, because I would think that his position would be that "larger" and "smaller" would just be "events," and therefore not real. At least they would not be material; he seems to be saying that an event is real, even if not material.

If I am reading all this correctly then this reinforces the point that I think a lot of people kick back against, or even refuse to entertain the possibility of --- that the emphasis on dreams during sleep and the visions of madmen as being 'real' are part and parcel of a total overhaul of ways of thinking, in which Epicurus is doubling down that we must consider everything that affects us as being "real" rather than being caught up in the game being played by lots of people (Stoics then and now, lots of others today too) that we shouldn't consider the things that affect us as being "real" unless they have a flesh and blood or fully material existence.

There's a lot at stake in the issue of whether we should require "reality" to have a physical existence in order for us to consider it to be real and to exclude everything that does not possess material existence as "fantasy"

[Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?](#)

[Caught in a landslide, no escape from reality...](#)

Post by “Cassius” of August 28, 2024 at 7:29 AM

The episode should be released later today. One thing that Joshua brings up tangentially is a reference to Zeno's paradoxes - specifically as to whether Achilles could outrun the tortoise if the tortoise had any head start at all.

In our current context, the important of that is the question of what Zeno was advocating and why. Was he **really** asserting that Achilles cannot outrun a tortoise? Or was he making the opposite point, and expecting us to make the obvious deduction, that what we see must be taken as more real and more important than what a logical formula divorced from the senses might say?

I don't know that we have discussed that enough, and even if we have in prior conversations, this is a classic challenge to the senses that it would benefit us to highlight somewhere on the forum more so than we do now.

Perhaps all of his 'paradoxes' need the same treatment, the the tortoise one is maybe the best well known.

Post by “Cassius” of August 28, 2024 at 2:17 PM

Lucretius Today Episode 243 - "From "[All Sensations Are True](#)" to Reasoning By Similarity And Analogy" - is now available:

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