

Can you be an epicurean and use some logic with the senses?

Post by “godek” of December 6, 2018 at 10:53 PM

I believe and follow mostly the fundamentals handouts Cassius had made. I haven't read them all yet but I finished the first one and I follow that entirely except for this one I am not sure about which I'll discuss now.

That being said I was wondering what if someone has a medical issue where their senses can see or hear that are not there and or have intrusive thoughts can you still be an epicurean and use logic to reason out why those problems are not real. For example, with intrusive thoughts that are negative the medical field recommends to use logic to reason out why it isn't true and come up with a more reasonable conclusion. Did the Epicureans advocate anything to counteract these thoughts?

Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2018 at 6:56 AM

Tyler philosophy is not a magic bullet, and when someone has a medical issue they always need to be relying on professional medical help. So I urge you to be sure you (or anyone with a clinical problem) is getting professional help and following those professionals' advice.

That having been said, much of Lucretius is devoted to using reasoned observation to study what goes on in nature, and with the senses, so as to better know how to process the perceptions we get from our senses.

Post by “Hiram” of December 7, 2018 at 12:33 PM

The writings of Philodemus make it clear that only (well-reasoned, empirical) arguments can heal the soul. This is made clear, for example, when he discusses the healing properties of music and argues that only the content of the songs, if it contains the healing words (logos, related to logic) of philosophy, can heal.

And so Philodemus prescribes cognitive therapy to deal with emotions, thoughts, and beliefs that are misaligned with nature.

But outside of that, if there are medical or mental health issues, no one in the Epicurean group is licensed for therapy and professional advice should be sought. Philosophy only helps to keep basic existential health, not in cases that require special care.

Post by “godek” of December 7, 2018 at 4:56 PM

Which book(s) of Philodemus is this that has these writings?

Post by “Cassius” of December 7, 2018 at 5:09 PM

Pending Hiram answering that question, I'll just post that other than a few, most of Philodemus' surviving writings are pretty fragmentary, so you have to know where to look, and decide which reconstructors to trust.

Post by “Hiram” of December 9, 2018 at 8:42 AM

[Quote from godek](#)

Which book(s) of Philodemus is this that has these writings?

This is what I found in his scroll on music (<http://societyofepicurus.com/reasonings-on-philodemus-on-music/>) (the part in gray is a direct quote from the scroll):

Quote

After summarizing Diogenes' scroll, Philodemus argues that music (by which he means instrumental music, as he treats lyrics in a separate scroll on Poetry) is not capable of making us better or worse in character. This is one of his key points, and it's because of

the lack of words, of lyrics.

This view is consistent with the view that therapeutic philosophy heals with words, with arguments. Therefore, music can not replace philosophy in its healing role: it can not, by itself, fix the human character. It can only have therapeutic value if it incorporates the words of the healing doctrines of philosophy.

And those that say that we are sweetened by music because she softens our souls and would deprive them of their savagery, one may consider them perfect imbeciles. In fact, it is only reason—because she teaches that none of the strange things that unreason invents has been produced by nature and that, furthermore, nothing of what she produces has any importance—that can perfectly reach this result, once it has attained its perfection, and while she is still on the path to perfection, it can alleviate in proportion

Post by “Mousikos” of May 15, 2019 at 6:50 AM

I must disagree with Philodemus here. There is a plenty of research showing the healing power of music, regardless of the absence or presence of words. Music heals because it speaks to our emotions, and this can have a positive effect on our physical body.

I'm not saying that music can replace philosophy, and if he was simply talking about the function of philosophy, as giving a deeper understanding, then I could agree.

Post by “Cassius” of May 15, 2019 at 8:28 AM

Mousikos thank you for pointing this out, I had not focused on it earlier. I agree with your conclusion and I am always very suspicious when an Epicurean text is translated as extolling "only reason" over feeling. Yes reason is important but it is not one of the three canonical faculties listed by Epicurus, and I suspect mangling or alteration when I see a quote like that.

Before I accept that quote as accurate I would want to have access to the original material and see what part of it is "reconstructed" from fragmentary text. I would want to see what the text before and after this section said. And absent firm and clear textual evidence that this translation is well supported, I would not consider it to be consistent with what I understand to

be Epicurus' position or worthy of equal status as other, better supported Epicurean texts..

In fact, in focusing on "reason" vs. "unreason" and talking about "words" and "perfection" -- this sounds more Stoic to me than Epicurean.

[Mousikos - Part of the background of this discussion is that I presume this comes from [the French collection of Epicurean fragments by Delattre that Hiram and I have discussed elsewhere](#). I now have a copy of that book but I don't read French and have not yet found passages which describe the origin of the texts it quotes and what part are reconstructed. I thank Hiram for finding this book and pointing it out, but until I see some of this material documented in English with descriptions of what part is reconstructed and what is not, I have to consider this material as only semi-reliable at best. And even if this part quoted in blue is correct, who is to say that the paragraph before it did not say "And now I am going to quote from ___ the Stoic, who was truly an imbecile."]

Post by “Hiram” of May 15, 2019 at 9:56 AM

[Cassius](#) did you get the Les Epicureens book in French? The scrolls of Philodemus are all there with commentary.

Post by “Cassius” of May 15, 2019 at 11:42 AM

Yes I did Hiram, and again thank you for recommending it. I have not had time to dig into it like I need to. I am looking for some kind of preliminary discussion of the source material, perhaps in the introduction, that will specify the issues I'm talking about -- what and how it was reconstructed, etc? Do you have a suggestion for a part of the intro where to start. I don't know yet how I am going to get it into a format in which I can run it through google translate.

Post by “Hiram” of May 15, 2019 at 4:50 PM

Scanning it won't help you paste it into google translate. I assumed you knew a little French. You can enter words you don't understand to make sense of it slowly, word for word.

Post by “Cassius” of May 15, 2019 at 8:17 PM

Well what I am presuming to do is to scan to PDF, then OCR the result so that it is machine-readable.

Post by “Hiram” of May 16, 2019 at 9:58 AM

Okay. This will give you access to all the Herculaneum scrolls without the interpretation by Nussbaum or others you find suspicious, so you will finally get a taste of many of these writings, including some of Epicurus' books On Nature. If you get stuck on any particular word / translation of a term, let me know. French was my major in college. Also, do read the commentary and explanations in the book. They are very professional and thorough and good to provide context and clarification.