

Thinking About Epicurean Viewpoints Such As The Eternal / Infinite Universe, And How To Discuss Them

Post by "Don" of January 11, 2021 at 10:40 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

On atoms meaning elements-- of course, elements are made of atoms (in current usage), not molecules. Maybe I am misunderstanding the suggestion though. Modern atoms would not fit Epicurus' atoms better than elementary particles, because they aren't just "cuttable"-- they can change into each other through radioactive decay.

Modern atoms would not - do not - fit the concept of ancient atoms. That's exactly my point. I'm sure Epicurus didn't know about radioactive decay, so I'll side step that.

Epicurus's and Lucretius's atoms/seeds/particles are fundamental building blocks of the cosmos in their system. They come together in novel ways to make everything. The seeds remain unchanged. My suggestion is that it's easier to think about their "Atomoi" more like our "elements" - carbon "atoms", hydrogen "atoms". I know our atoms are cuttable. (At one point, we didn't think they were but right now that's beside the point I'm trying to make). Leaving aside the cuttability for a moment, Epicurus's "Atomoi" came together in various configurations for a time, composed a compound, then came apart to go form another compound somewhere else. Our modern atoms of elements do this - at a very basic level of popular understanding. The carbon atom in a pencil is the same carbon atom in a diamond. The element atom doesn't change. Likewise, our atoms take on chemical bonds, some stronger, some weaker. I liken this to Lucretius's description of hooked and smooth "seeds". No, there aren't hooked and smooth atoms in our understanding now, but some bonds are stronger than others. They get "entangled" to use an ancient way of thinking: liked a box of fishhooks (or Christmas tree ornament hooks!). Smooth marbles don't become entangled, so - to Epicurus or Lucretius - marbles are like water "Atomoi". Granite is a stronger bond and harder to break apart. That's like the fishhooks being harder to break apart.

I'm trying to make an analogy between the ancient and modern ideas, not to equate one concept with another. That's all.