

What Would Epicurus Think of the Big Bang?

Post by "Cassius" of January 14, 2024 at 5:04 PM

I am watching Don's quantum fields video and I am reminded almost immediately that:

1 - Theoretical physicists tend toward the long-winded, no matter how excitedly they talk.

2 - The allusions to all the many experts who came before him in the same room and in front of the same table is a stark reminder that all of them "proved" to be "wrong" in the eyes of him in the early 2000's. Would a layperson be wrong in concluding that this presentation proves that it is impossible to be "right" in physics? And if it is impossible to have confidence in any conclusion in physics, what does that say about confidence in anything else? This is not a difficult point to see, so what is the answer that this and similar speakers expect to be understood by their listeners?

3 - Does not that every-changing series of positions on physics amount to a practical philosophical position that it is impossible to be right?

4 - Putting aside the conclusions that I presume he will eventually reach, what does that mean for the many generations of people who lived and died before him? Were the benighted and lost in ignorance and suffer wasted lives because they did not have the opportunity to hear his presentation at Cambridge?

5 - Why do I keep thinking about the movie "Agora" and the Pythagoreans plotting the movements of the stars and planets just before the religious mobs broke in to destroy the science/library buildings and kill Hypatia herself? Would Epicurus, had he lived long enough, cited Agora as an example of how it is not important that we know "everything" but rather enough to be sure that there are rational non-supernatural explanations of things that allow us to live happily? Is it not all too possible that the disconnect between theory and practicality is a continuing problem, and that the halls of Cambridge will one day suffer the same fate as the library at Alexandria?

6 - Doesn't this also ring of the story of Polyaeus, who saw Epicurus' point and turned at least a part of his attention to the important of living happily, rather than making the study of geometry (or math, or whatever it was) an end in itself?

7 - Surely as his excited voice shows, there is a lot of pleasure in studying theoretical physics, and I presume all of us here share that to at least some degree. It would be pretty weird of an internet-based forum not to appreciate science, and I think we have a healthy respect for it. But is the dogged pursuit of ever-smaller particles while leaving unexamined the impact that has on society (at the very least, ourselves and our friends) pretty much the equivalent of "sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll" in regard to its ultimate impact on our "health" if we pursue it without regard to

wider issues?

8 - Can it really be true that someone like this speaker can divorce his scientific theories from the impact that they have on himself and his friends? Does get around to addressing that by the end of the presentation?

These are things that occur to me in the intervals of constant interruptions that have prevented me from finishing yet! 😊