

Eclectic Take on Epicurean Philosophy; Earlier Origin of Some Epicurean Concepts; Method of Loci

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of November 22, 2023 at 3:40 PM

To start with here is two definitions of [Eclecticism](#):

Quote

1. the practice of [deriving](#) ideas, style, or taste from a broad and diverse range of sources. "the eclecticism of his work consciously reflects his upbringing"
2. **PHILOSOPHY** the theories or methods of the ancient Eclectic [philosophers](#), who did not belong to or found any recognized school of thought but selected [doctrines](#) from various schools of thought. "there was a double movement going on, towards Eclecticism on the one side, and towards Scepticism on the other side"

Some famous examples throughout history are:

1. **Hellenistic Jews**: Similar to Catholics, took many concepts from Greeks and implemented them into their religion.
2. **Catholics and Eastern Orthodox**: Aristotle and Plato respectively is a the foundation of both these massive religions metaphysical ground work, transubstantiation, the view that when the Priest says the words of consecration the substance of the bread is "converted" to the body of Christ and by "natural accompaniment the blood, soul and divinity are also present comes directly from Aristotle [accidents](#) and [substances](#).
3. **Neo Platonism**: Although I am unaware of any person directly speaking of this in a academic paper or book (there may be I am just unaware) Neo Platonism takes from Plato and has many similarities to the Vedic schools. (I should say Plotinus wouldn't have called himself a Neoplatonist but just a Platonist, it's the mix of the Vedic schools that's the Eclectic part)
4. **Mindfulness - Neo Buddhism**: The Idea that you can insert mindfulness into any religion, philosophy, cooperate meeting, sports event while forgoing the tradition behind the practice (and the point of the practice)
5. **Modern Stoicism**: Takes the ethical part of the ancient Stoics world view but everything else is replaced by either Christianity, Islam et al or by some atheistic movement.

Is it a problem for Epicurean Philosophy?

What is being spoken about with this question is this. **Is Epicurean philosophy lacking in any of its 3 main parts - Physics, Canon and Ethics so that it needs to be supplemented with another philosophy or practice?**

What is not being spoken about is **whether we should take Epicurus physics directly as true and ignore any modern scientific discovery and advancements. Obviously we update as we go, just as Epicurus would.**

Many people take bits and pieces of neo-Epicureanism - asceticism, "enjoying cheese", simple pleasures but ignore the entire corpus left behind and being spoke about today, missing the entire reason Epicurus spoke about pleasure to begin with.

So what is the danger or benefit to people committed to saying "Epicurus was more or less right about everything related to living and nature"?

The most obvious one is losing identity all together. A personal anecdote from living in a monastery in the Catholic Church is that it wasn't Catholic. They were practically Buddhists that said Mass.

Has eclecticism influenced your EP? Do you think it's beneficial, what do you think the dangers are?

Post by "Cassius" of November 22, 2023 at 4:31 PM

Great thread starter Eoghan!

One aspect of this that should be said is that according to our forum rules and reason for the forums existence, we're not going to promote a general eclectic approach here as that is inconsistent with our reason for being here.

But having said that, there is a general issue that everyone faces of putting together one's own life from whatever elements are available, and it's great to discuss in general how to go about thinking of the meaning of consistency and when fo deviate from it.

Certainly Epicurus iris himself was a strong deviator from the consensus that existed when he started!

So this issue touches on questions of skepticism and "waiting" and when and how to make course corrections.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2023 at 5:59 PM

Some good questions. Just some thoughts off the top of my head...We try to avoid eclecticism here on the forum because it helps us focus and hone in on the actual teachings of Epicurus. Some background (and a reminder)...On our new user page, it states:

Thank You For Visiting EpicureanFriends ...

This is the place to study and discuss Epicurus with people who support and promote [classical Epicurean philosophy](#). There are many places on the internet where other philosophies can be studied, but few are dedicated exclusively to Epicurus. We are the home for [classical Epicurean philosophy](#), unadulterated by Stoicism, Platonism, or Eclecticism.

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

Many people take bits and pieces of neo-Epicureanism - asceticism, "enjoying cheese", simple pleasures but ignore the entire corpus left behind and being spoke about today, missing the entire reason Epicurus spoke about pleasure to begin with.

I would blame the "enjoying cheese" aspect on the small "e" epicurean food movement. And I would blame the idea of Epicurean ascetisism on academics who prefer Stoicism.

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

So what is the danger or benefit to people committed to saying "Epicurus was more or less right about everything related to living and nature"?

I think that is a vague statement, so anyone who might say likely hasn't spent much time studying the philosophy. Epicurus lived in a time before modern science and modern psychology, so there are aspects of these that we as modern people can use now. Epicureanism isn't a religion, but it is a philosophical worldview. And I agree with Cassius when he said:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But having said that, there is a general issue that everyone faces of putting together one's own life from whatever elements are available, and it's great to discuss in general how to go about thinking of the meaning of consistency and when fo deviate from it.

I would say that the two main aspects of Epicurean philosophy is the materialist worldview and its telos. If you can't agree with those two things, then you are either "not Epicurean" or you are "eclectic". But there isn't anything that says you have to declare yourself an Epicurean to

benefit from the philosophy.

There may be some individuals who feel that they need some "supernatural" or "mystical" ideas in their thoughts and their worldview. This would be inconsistent with a materialist understanding of life.

The dangers of eclecticism is losing track of what was actually taught by Epicurus, or claiming that Epicurus said something that he did not say.

Post by “Cassius” of November 22, 2023 at 6:14 PM

Probably worth restating that these two aren't inconsistent from my personal point of view:

1 - From my point of view, everyone has a right to make up their minds and do whatever they want to do, and I think in general we want maximum freedom of expression and action in the world. I know that I want that for myself, and so I don't think it's a good idea to do anything to deny it to others.

2 - On the other hand, from my point of view as well, every "group project" in life requires some degree of agreement among the members of the group on what the project is and how to attain it. This website is all "I" (our core people) can really speak for, and we have a right and obligation to set out clearly what we're doing so that people who invest their time and effort in it will know the ground rules before they start making that investment -- so that they can count on their investment meaning something as they themselves set out to contribute.

We'll do our best here at the forum to balance both those considerations, but (2) is going to take priority over (1) because we're just one website, one location, and it's easy for alternative views to coalesce elsewhere.

Now having repeated that again about what "WE're" doing, there is still a "philosophical" issue with questions such as Eoghan raised in terms of:

1 - When we say "eclectic" and "eclecticism" what do we really mean? In my view what we're really talking about is a semi-philosophical position that "consistency" is not important or that it is secondary to a particular result. In a sense we all agree, after concluding that pleasure/happiness is the goal, that "whatever works in our case" is actually the right way to look at things. However from the Epicurean viewpoint there are in fact unchanging and unchangeable aspects of the universe that derive from the atoms that we can't change no matter how much we mix and match ideas. It's at that level I think that it's most worthwhile to talk about "eclecticism" as a controversial viewpoint.

2 - That still leaves huge variety of alternative choices in how one lives an Epicurean life, and I think most all of us encourage experimentation and variety, but it's not experimentation or variety for the sake of experimentation or variety, it's calibration of alternatives in the pursuit of pleasure, within boundaries that we agree on such as no supernatural gods and no life after death and the primary role of the senses over abstract propositional logic -- things like that which serve as boundaries that we can all know about and understand through reading Epicurus.

Post by “Don” of November 23, 2023 at 12:31 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I would blame the "enjoying cheese" aspect on the small "e" epicurean food movement.

Yes, that and the whole "Epicurus only at bread and water with the occasional 'pot of cheese.'"

Post by “Don” of November 23, 2023 at 12:40 AM

This brought to my mind the following question:

How much did Epicurus "borrow" from the existing cultural and philosophical environment and "adapt" into his philosophy?

We know Epicurus didn't blink into existence and seal himself inside a hermetically tight Garden. What ideas did he pick up from simply growing up and developing his ideas in Samos, Ionia, Asia Minor, and Athens? How did he take existing ideas and use and adapt them? There have to be some.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of November 23, 2023 at 5:45 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

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I am sure these 2 are obvious to everyone here but I will throw them out there to start the conversation

[Aristippus](#)

and

[Democritus](#)

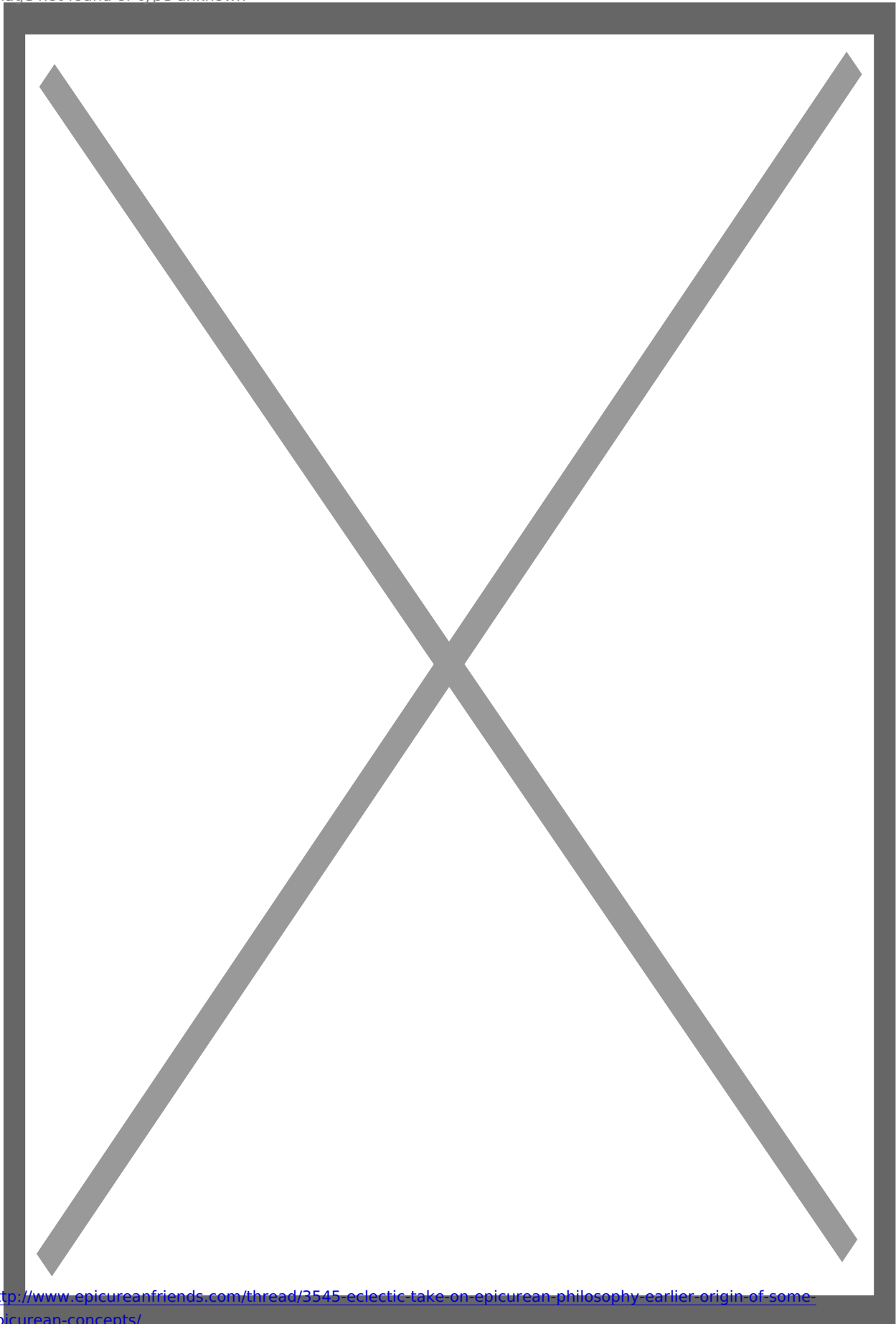
Aristippus and the Cyrenaics have a book devoted to them called "The birth of Hedonism". There is a famous story of Socrates trying to tell Aristippus to go easy with partying and women but he didn't listen. (Story could be legend)

Democritus is the father of Atomism.

Post by "Don" of November 23, 2023 at 7:07 AM

We mentioned this at the 20th:

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<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3545-eclectic-take-on-epicurean-philosophy-earlier-origin-of-some-epicurean-concepts/>

[Method of loci - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

I bring it up here as something that isn't mentioned explicitly in Epicurus's writings (as far as I know) but would have been in the cultural mix. That is, Epicurus would have been aware of the technique (it dates back to 5th c BCE), and he encouraged memorization of texts. Why wouldn't he use the tools available? But it was also taught in rhetoric and he wasn't fond of rhetoric. But the technique could be used for purposes other than rhetoric. But ...

And so on.

Post by “Cassius” of November 23, 2023 at 7:25 AM

That cite to Cicero looks interesting enough to find the original.

I see that the full work is at Attalus:

[Cicero, De Oratore : index of translation](#)

Now to find the cite

Post by “Don” of November 23, 2023 at 7:35 AM

In light of learning the "method of loci" is from ancient Greece, I read these excerpts below in a different light. I'm curious what the Greek is.

DL 10.12:

Among the early philosophers, says Diocles, his favourite was [Anaxagoras](#), although he occasionally disagreed with him, and [Archelaus](#) the teacher of Socrates. Diocles adds that [Epicurus] used to train his friends in committing his treatises to memory.

DL 10.35+

(Epicurus to Herodotus, greeting.)

[35] "For those who are unable to study carefully all my physical writings or to go into the longer treatises at all, I have myself prepared an epitome of the whole system, Herodotus, to

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preserve in the memory enough of the [principal doctrines](#),⁵⁷ to the end that on every occasion they may be able to aid themselves on the most important points, so far as they take up the study of Physics. Those who have made some advance in the survey of the entire system ought to fix in their minds under the principal headings an elementary outline of the whole treatment of the subject. For a comprehensive view is often required, the details but seldom.

[36] "To the former, then--the main heads--we must continually return, and must memorize them so far as to get a valid conception of the facts, as well as the means of discovering all the details exactly when once the general outlines are rightly understood and remembered ; since it is the privilege of the mature student to make a ready use of his conceptions by referring every one of them to elementary facts and simple terms. For it is impossible to gather up the results of continuous diligent study of the entirety of things, unless we can embrace in short formulas and hold in mind all that might have been accurately expressed even to the minutest detail.

DL 10.84+

(Epicurus to Pythocles, greeting.)

[84] "In your letter to me, of which Cleon was the bearer, you continue to show me affection which I have merited by my devotion to you, and you try, not without success, to recall the considerations which make for a happy life. To aid your memory you ask me for a clear and concise statement respecting celestial phenomena ; for what we have written on this subject elsewhere is, you tell me, hard to remember, although you have my books constantly with you. I was glad to receive your request and am full of pleasant expectations.

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 23, 2023 at 9:21 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I would blame the "enjoying cheese" aspect on the small "e" epicurean food movement.

Yes, that and the whole "Epicurus only at bread and water with the occasional 'pot of cheese.'"

The source of that was Diogenes Laertius, biographical commentary.

And yet we have PD8 to throw into the mix.

And this also reminds us that we do what pleases us and leads to the best result, according to circumstances, and not any one specific thing for everyone...no hard and fast rules, but just pleasure and pain with choices and avoidances.

Perhaps an aspect of eclecticism -- and a danger since it can water down the Epicurean system of philosophical concepts -- comes about when exact "advice" is given in such manner as if it implies that everyone should do the same thing just because it appears to lead to pleasure.

Also, "wrong" (in that for some it might lead to an unpleasant/unhealthy outcome) would be to claim that we should all just eat bread and cheese because Diogenes Laertius wrote that Epicurus did -- this would be a kind of "fundamentalism" which is going too far, and an example of not applying correctly the system of philosophical concepts. Also, some here on the forum may enjoy gazing upon an image or bust of Epicurus, but this is not part of the framework of the deeper system of philosophical concepts -- so it is up to each person to decide if they find pleasure or benefit in such a practice. As an aside, since it is a popular practice in Buddhism with the image of the Buddha, and "I have been there, done that" with the image of Buddha, then I don't find this of any benefit for my own well-being now (and no longer "practicing" Buddhism).

Post by "Kalosyni" of November 24, 2023 at 10:09 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I would say that the two main aspects of Epicurean philosophy is the materialist worldview and its telos.

This is obvious, but will say it anyway: We don't believe in a materialist worldview and the goal of pleasure because Epicurus said so, but instead we believe this system of thought is correct because we understand the reasons to do so.

Correct understanding helps prevent unnecessary eclecticism.

Another danger is the temptation to extrapolate ideas and taking them out of context from the original text (probably guilty of this myself occasionally). These deviations over time can lead to problems (obviously). This is why I think being consistent with the framework of the philosophy is so important.

Post by “Pacatus” of November 26, 2023 at 2:11 PM

“You can have such an open mind that it is too porous to hold a conviction.” George Crane (1901–1995) *

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In another context, this reminded me of Lucretius on gratitude:

“Then again, to keep feeding an ungrateful mind with good things, without ever being able to fill it and satisfy its appetite—as is the case with the seasons of the year, when they come around with their fruits and manifold delights and yet never satisfy our appetite for the fruits of life—this, in my opinion, is what is meant by the story of those maidens in the flower of their age ***pouring water into a riddled vessel that cannot possibly be filled.***”

Lucretius; Ferguson Smith, Martin. On the Nature of Things (III: 1003 - 1010). Hackett Publishing. Kindle Edition.

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* It seems Crane was something of a hack, as well as misogynist – but, as they say, even a blind squirrel can find an acorn once in awhile. 😬 😊 I came upon the quote elsewhere.

Post by “Pacatus” of November 26, 2023 at 3:39 PM

I’d like to add that, at the other end of the spectrum, one can have such a closed-fist mind that all they have is conviction: their “truth” is the only acceptable “truth,” must be all the “truth” and nothing but the “truth.” Evolving evidence be damned. (For example, certain scriptural-literalist religious fundamentalists.) The possibility of alternative explanations (ala Epicurus) rejected out of hand.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of November 26, 2023 at 3:55 PM

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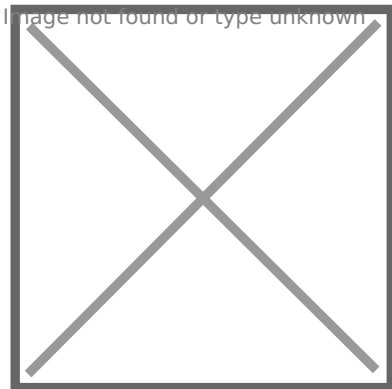
Guilty. 😊

Post by "Pacatus" of November 26, 2023 at 4:23 PM

I myself tend to the leaky vessel side -- or, as my brother once quipped: "Mind like a steel -- sieve." 😊 😊

Post by "Don" of November 26, 2023 at 5:13 PM

Revisiting the memorization and "method of loci" idea...



[Relativizing Unfinishedness: Lucretian Textuality and Epicurean Therapy](#), in J. Fabre-Serris, M. Formisano, and S. Frangoulidis (eds.), *Labor imperfectus: Unfinished, Incomplete, Partial Texts in Classical Antiquity (Trends in Classics Series)*,

Over the past few centuries, scholars have often regarded Lucretius' DRN as a fascinating example of artistic non-finito, mirroring the untimely death of a...

www.academia.edu

I found the section 2, Recursive argumentation: Lucretius' spiritual exercises, very interesting. I haven't had a chance to review the whole paper yet, but the authors take on the repetition in Lucretius was novel and compelling from what I read. The method of loci came to mind with:

Lucretius: "keep atomic laws under seal (obsignatum habere) and to "retain it in the depository of one's memory" (memori mandatum mente tenere).

I also remember reading elsewhere that some translators dismiss the repetitions in Lucretius as evidence of a work in progress. I like this scholar's take on it as an alternative perspective.

PS. I'm not overly fond of Pierre Hadot's specific term "spiritual exercise," however, I don't really have a problem with his general ideas (as far as I understand them).

Post by "Bryan" of January 4, 2025 at 1:40 AM

On the topic of memorization (ἡ ἀπομνημόνευσις, **apomnemóneusis**), I wanted to share these bits side-by-side:

"...at some point, he was memorizing – or he was retaining an experience analogous to memorization – and he was occupying himself with [it], for which reason he was silent..."

"...Memory, or the experience analogous to memory..."

"...this memory of it or a movement analogous to memory..."

--Epíkouros, Peri Phýseōs, Book 25, P.Herc. 1056 fr. 4.4 & col. 15