

Carl Sagan, the 4th dimension, episode 20 of Lucretius Today, physics

Post by "Cassius" of August 14, 2021 at 1:28 PM

Thanks for the very thoughtful post. I haven't had time to watch the video yet, but I want to make a couple of comments. I'm not prepared with time enough to write lengthy response but I want to lay out what I think are the basics:

[Quote from camotero](#)

But there's something that bothers me about trying to say that Epicurus "had a lot of things right" when it comes to physics, as if, if he hadn't, everything else could be discarded as invalid.

I think when we summarize by saying that we think Epicurus "had a lot of things right" we're really saying that we think he had "the important things" right -- such that the universe runs on natural principles and is not subject to supernatural oversight. In the end, I think that is a conclusion based on a combination of physics observations and choices made in epistemology, which is probably why Laertius says that the Epicureans tended to combine the discussion of the two, as Lucretius does.

So yes I would maintain that there are things that are "essential" that he got right in his physics, that are the essential foundation of the rest, and then there are many other things that are less important, most of which he included under the heading of "we don't have enough information to know which answer is right and all we need is a set of alternatives that provide options for us to consider that are natural"

I am in agreement with you that a search for a totally consistent and comprehensive set of physics propositions, and I think Epicurus says that himself as well, especially in the passage (Herodotus? Pythocles?) where he says that what is needed is not a comprehensive theory of everything but to live happily.

However to bring that point back in a full circle, he could reach the conclusion that what is needed is to live happily ONLY because his physics and epistemology convinced him that there is no life after death to be concerned about reward/punishment, or supernatural gods to be concerned about obeying.

[Quote from camotero](#)

as I understand it, he didn't say that his physics were the foundation of his whole philosophy, but the Canon is, but I may be wrong about this.

That carries over from what I typed above, and I would say that he was confident in his epistemology NOT because it was logically sound, but because it went hand in hand and mutually supported his physics, and vice versa. The epistemology could not stand without confidence in a physics which helps us explain how the senses work, and of course our physics could not stand without our understanding and having confidence in the sense. The two are mutually supporting and both essential. The ethics follows from both together, in my view of Epicurus.

[Quote from camotero](#)

the things that we, after observation can be sure that are impossible (like having external invisible forces influencing our lives and having things appearing or disappearing to and out of nowhere),

And that's where we end up together, and our difference may only be that you seem to believe that it is self-evidently correct to take the position that "after observation we can be sure" that certain things are "impossible" without a grounding in BOTH the physics and the epistemology. I would say yes that is the conclusion, but ONLY because we have confidence in our epistemology AND our physics. I think Epicurus would say that without that confidence in both we can NEVER be sure of our positions, thus we will always be plagued with significant doubts that will "by definition" keep us from enjoying the happiest life, free of the most anxieties, that we could otherwise experience.

Sorry I don't have time this moment for more.