

# Is reality real? (from Big Think)

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2022 at 3:57 PM

Book 4 of Lucretius is all about illusions and other distortions that appear to us, yet despite that confirms that the senses are all we have so that all reasoning still ultimately rests on the senses.

Add to that the previously stated earlier in the poem observations that the universe has no center, and no edge, and no beginning (or end) and you have the elements for concluding that the search for any perspective of objectivity from "outside" the universe or by a creator or from a center or a point of origin is impossible. You therefore eliminate the possibility of a standard of omniscience or a single "absolute" answer as the test of "truth."

That leaves repeatability as the ultimate test of the senses and what is real to us - what is confirmed through repeated observation is what is "real."

You have to assemble these thoughts from various places in Herodotus, Diogenes Laertius, Oinoanda (who states that the Flux exists but it is not so fast that our senses cannot make sense of it.) and various other places (Torquatus, Sextus Empericus). From all of them together you can assemble Epicurus' viewpoint that there is a reality apart from the observer, but the senses (which are the mechanism of getting info about that reality) have to be understood so you can assemble the data into something meaningful to you.

But you yourself are a combination of matter and void in constant motion, so we accept that there are limits on the accuracy of observation and that neither we nor the thing being observed are eternally the same.

The big issue underlying all this is not to let the realization of this truth throw you into nihilism and despondency or to thinking that your life is somehow worthless or worth less because of it. The whole contention that anything (like ideas or virtue or Jehovah) is eternally existing without change and is the proper standard of objective truth is nonsense and a sham in the first place.

I think that is the real issue that bothers people. Epicurus rejects the absolutist worldview and this disconcerts them, but he does not stop there as videos like this do. Instead Epicurus points to the correct answer on which we can build a successful life. It's really almost a religious life or death issue and that comes out in the the intensity of part Of Book 4 I quoted above. Toying with nihilism is not innocent fun. The person who tells you that nothing is knowable is not just wrong, he is a manipulative fraud with an upside down worldview (puts his head where his feet should be). That's very similar to the person who says it would be better to never have been born, or to take a "bring it on" attitude toward death, as Epicurus denounces in the letter to Menoeceus.

This is explosive stuff that Epicurus thought was worth fighting over just like determinism or false religion.

And thus the "canon of truth" was referred to as if Epicurus brought it down from heaven, due to its importance.