

# Epicurean Worldview, Personal Identity, and Creating Community

Post by "Cassius" of January 20, 2022 at 9:49 AM

[Quote from smoothiekiwi](#)

His idea, that the Sun is as big as it seems (—> DeWitt), is very naive, even in the ancient world

He was clearly wrong, but I don't think that "naive" is warranted. He had very specific epistemological reasons for his view point based on observing objects at a distance here on earth, and he was also concerned about the use of mathematics to allege that the sun and other stars are gods. Exploring that further belongs in another thread, but I wanted to make a note on this.

Also, as to Martin's post above, which I agree with, I think the big picture point on all of this is that Epicurus was using his physics as a foundation for his epistemology, such as is stated in the quote that's currently at the top of the website home page:

Quote

**Moreover, unless the constitution of the world is thoroughly understood, we shall by no means be able to justify the verdicts of our senses. Further, our mental perceptions all arise from our sensations; and if these are all to be true, as the system of Epicurus proves to us, *then only* will cognition and perception become possible. ... [W]hen cognition and knowledge have been invalidated, every principle concerning the conduct of life and the performance of its business becomes invalidated. So from natural science we borrow courage to withstand the fear of death, and firmness to face superstitious dread, and tranquillity of mind, through the removal of ignorance concerning the mysteries of the world, and self-control, arising from the elucidation of the nature of the passions and their different classes....**

And we can see that reflected in Diogenes Laertius:

Quote

We must begin with the first letter, but I will first speak briefly about the divisions of his philosophy. It is divided into three parts, the Canonicon (or Procedure), the Physics and

the Ethics. The Canonicon gives the method of approach to the system, and is contained in the work called The Canon. The Physics contains all the investigation into nature, and is contained in the thirty-seven books On Nature and in an abridged form in the letters. The Ethics deals with choice and avoidance, and is contained in the books On Lives and the letters and the book on The End. The Epicureans usually group the Canonicon with the Physics and state that it deals with the criterion of truth and the fundamental principles and contains the elements of the system.

In the past I don't think I paid sufficient attention to that line, and I think from now on I am going to emphasize it as strongly as I can.

The purpose of the study of physics is to be able to grasp the way the universe works well enough to understand how to make sense of anything. Unless you have a basic framework that establishes that knowledge is possible, you can't make any progress on anything else.

Epicurean physics isn't perfect from our point of view today, but it provided a basis for being able to have confidence in things right in front of us - things that are essential to happy living. I don't think anything in modern physics has come close to an effective challenge to that basic point of view, which is probably summarized in this statement of Diogenes of Oinoanda. He gets taken to task for attributing the wrong view to Aristotle rather than to others, but I am not going to be quick to just as wrong someone who presumably had access to much more of Aristotle's materials than we do. The point is to argue against those "who hold the same view... that nothing is scientifically knowable...."

#### Quote

Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.