

A Recap of Principles of Epicurean Physics

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I recall the responses when two people who shared the Nobel Prize for physics for the “standard model” of particle physics were asked about string theory (note that I am not a physicist). Sheldon Glashow replied to the effect that it was all philosophy at best, and not science, since it could never be tested. Steven Weinberg responded that he would be surprised if there were not something to it, in part because the mathematics were so elegant. [As best as I can remember the clip from Brian Greene’s Nova series.]

I don’t have the quote, but I recall Epicurus saying something to the effect that, given multiple causal theories (say, multiple “alternative hypotheses”), none of them should be rejected until actually disproved.

Epicurus’ physics, though astute, was nevertheless timebound. But I have often found an openness in Epicurus that is at least equal to even that of the Pyrrhonists in their epistemological agnosticism, despite Sextus Empiricus’ denunciation of him as a “dogmatist.” Surely, one can be an Epicurean whilst acknowledging various possible scientific explanations (and without entering the fray).