

Democritus' "Nothing is truly real but atoms and void" statement

Post by "Don" of October 4, 2022 at 9:37 AM

FYI...

[Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, BOOK IX, Chapter 7. DEMOCRITUS\(? 460-357 B.C.\)](#)

An excerpt is below. Both the similarities and differences between Democritus and Epicurus are intriguing.

The third phrase interested me though:

"everything else is merely thought to exist."

τὰ δ' ἄλλα πάντα νενομίσθαι

That last word νενομίσθαι is simply a verb form of the same word used in the Democritus quote above: is by custom, is commonly used, etc. So Diogenes corroborates the reference by a Sextus Empiricus.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, νομ-ίζω](#)

Excerpt:

Such was the life of our philosopher.

[44] His opinions are these. The first principles of the universe are atoms and empty space ; everything else is merely thought to exist. The worlds are unlimited ; they come into being and perish. Nothing can come into being from that which is not nor pass away into that which is not. Further, the atoms are unlimited in size and number, and they are borne along in the whole universe in a vortex, and thereby generate all composite things--fire, water, air, earth ; for even these are conglomerations of given atoms. And it is because of their solidity that these atoms are impassive and unalterable. The sun and the moon have been composed of such smooth and spherical masses [i.e. atoms], and so also the soul, which is identical with reason. We see by virtue of the impact of images upon our eyes.

[45] All things happen by virtue of necessity, the vortex being the cause of the creation of all things, and this he calls necessity. The end of action is tranquillity, which is not identical with pleasure, as some by a false interpretation have understood, but a state in which the soul continues calm and strong, undisturbed by any fear or superstition or any other emotion. This he calls well-being and many other names. The qualities of things exist merely by convention ;

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in nature there is nothing but atoms and void space. These, then, are his opinions.