

Welcome Michal Handzel !

Post by "Cassius" of November 22, 2022 at 2:37 PM

This line of discussion - and the importance of knowing the details of the history of Greek philosophy in particular and philosophy in general- reminds me of my personal position on how much history is needed.

As much as I want to know as many details as I can, there is no way I will ever be able to learn to read any Greek with any confidence, and I'm not much better at Latin. I'll never be able to backtrack and become an expert in the history of world philosophies, or to be able to even process, much less pass judgment on, the many complicated philosophical arguments. So if all I have to rely on is philosophy books I will never have any confidence in anything. But I can read enough from many different sources to see the outline of the argument that Epicurus was making, and it rings just as true to me today regardless of the passing of years, and without recourse to any arguments from "authority."

I can use my own observations to validate that in every way that is significant to me, "[nothing can be created from nothing](#) at the will of the gods" and that is personally sufficient to me as a starting point to take confidence in the rest of the core elements of the philosophy. I do not have the luxury of sitting back and contemplating possibilities for years on end - my life is short and I have to live it without all the information I would like to have, using the best judgment that I can come up with based on evidence. I see no reason to think the universe as a whole had a beginning, or that it has any supernatural ruler over it, or that there is an absolute set of "ideal forms" or "essences" or "right and wrong" commandments that I have to follow. That leaves me with what Epicurus pointed out - the faculty of pleasure and pain - as the only ultimate basis for what to do in life. That's where I have ended up after my years of study of Epicurus, and I don't see any reason to expect that any of those conclusions are likely to change.

It's not quite the same as Thomas Jefferson's statement, but close, especially to the underlined part, and I am content with this reasoning be it 1820 or 300 BC:

Jefferson to John Adams, August 15, 1820: ([Full version at Founders.gov](#))

.... But enough of criticism: let me turn to your puzzling letter of May 12. on matter, spirit, motion etc. It's crowd of scepticisms kept me from sleep. I read it, and laid it down: read it, and laid it down, again and again: and to give rest to my mind, **I was obliged to recur ultimately to my habitual anodyne, 'I feel: therefore I exist.' I feel bodies which are not myself: there are other existencies then. I call them *matter*. I feel them changing place. This gives me motion. Where there is an absence of matter, I call it *void*, or *nothing*, or *immaterial space*. On the basis of sensation, of matter and motion, we may erect the**

fabric of all the certainties we can have or need. I can conceive *thought* to be an action of a particular organisation of matter, formed for that purpose by it's creator, as well as that *attraction* is an action of matter, or *magnetism* of loadstone. When he who denies to the Creator the power of endowing matter with the mode of action called *thinking* shall shew how he could endow the Sun with the mode of action called *attraction*, which reins the planets in the tract of their orbits, or how an absence of matter can have a will, and, by that will, put matter into motion, then the materialist may be lawfully required to explain the process by which matter exercises the faculty of thinking. When once we quit the basis of sensation, all is in the wind. **To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise:** but I believe I am supported in my creed of materialism by Locke, Tracy, and Stewart.

So like Lucian's Alexander the Oracle Monger story I will happily entertain any claim to supernatural phenomena that anyone wants to show me really exists through evidence I can validate. And if and when I am able to validate that evidence I will certainly take it into account and change my worldview accordingly. But there is no reason whatsoever to entertain the possibility that any such evidence will ever be produced, and in turn there is massive reason to believe that any assertions of such evidence are purely fraudulent - just as with Alexander.

And just as I will be happy to entertain any verifiable evidence, I am always happy to learn more about the arguments and the background that led Epicurus to the places where he ended up, and I am happy and appreciative to draw on the information that others in other careers have been able to learn.