

The Twelve Fundamentals - Discussion on Lucretius Today Podcast

Post by “Cassius” of January 4, 2023 at 7:49 AM

Just FWIW I see that the Long article I cited is the source for this comment that I remembered about the comparison of DeWitt's and Clay's list.

³⁰ An earlier, less careful attempt to identify the στοιχειώσεις was made by De Witt (pp. 156 f.). Clay (p. 271) finds it 'odd' that there is no mention among these of the 'swerve' of atoms.

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As Diskin Clay has recently shown (1973a), Epicurus found it a useful educational device to reduce his philosophy to a number of elementary propositions or axioms (στοιχειώσεις). A scholium to chapter 44 of the *Letter to Herodotus*, which summarises the basis of Epicurean physics, refers to Epicurus' twelve στοιχειώσεις, and Clay has identified these with ten propositions from the *Letter* (38.8-44.1, 54.3-6), which also recur in Lucretius, and the first two *Kuriai Doxai*.³⁰ Clay's list includes a set of what we may call natural laws or necessary truths, conspicuous among which are the first: 'nothing comes into being out of nothing' and the second: 'nothing is reduced to nothing'. Two fundamental concepts which are stated or implied in this list are 'limit' and 'unlimited'. The universe is unlimited, for it contains an infinite number of bodies (atoms) and infinite void. There is an infinite number of atoms with similar shapes, but the variety of atomic shapes is not infinite, though too large to be conceived of (ἀπερίληπτα).

The validity of these general statements is established largely by reference to phenomena, and their purpose is to provide the foundations for a strictly mechanistic explanation of the world. By postulating an infinite number of atoms with enormously varied shapes, Epicurus was influenced by the need to account for the variety of things we experience (*Eb. Hdt.* 42). The limit on the number of atomic shades was also