

# "Epicurean Philosophy: An Introduction from the 'Garden of Athens'" edited by Christos Yapijakis

Post by "Eikadistes" of January 9, 2023 at 10:02 AM

[Godfrey](#) thank you for identifying this! Amazon is sending me this book tomorrow and I happen to be on a bit of a ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΜΑΤΑ kick so I am really interested to see other people's interpretations of the "elementary principles." I've been breaking-down the *Epistles* and am including this brief sketch for myself for future references when I have a chance to read the book and explore how they constructed their list of elementary principles.

## ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΜΑΤΑ — ΣΤΟΙΚΗΙΩΜΑΤΑ — ELEMENTARIES

**στοιχειώματα**, "elementary principles" (EH 36.8-9); **στοιχείωσις**, "first principles" (EH 37.5)

### Αἱ δώδεκα στοιχειώσεις — "The Twelve Elements"

Epicurus' ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΜΑΤΑ (*stoikheiómata*, or "elementary outline", per R. D. Hicks) conceptually anticipated the **Cosmological Principle**, the **Law of Conservation of Mass**, the **Law of Definite Proportions**, the **First Law of Thermodynamics**, **Molecular Vibration**, **Brownian Motion**, the **Special Theory of Relativity**, and **Quantum Field Theory**.

Epicurus' **Synopsis On Physics** (to *Herodotus*):

"Indeed it is necessary to go back on the main principles, and constantly to fix in one's memory enough to give one the most essential comprehension of the truth." (EH 36.1-2)

"I who urge upon others the constant occupation in the investigation of nature, and find my own peace chiefly in a life so occupied, have composed for you another **epitome** on these lines, summing up the first principles of the whole doctrine." (EH. 37.4-5)

- - **1. Things don't just appear.** (EH 38.10-11; DRN I 150-174)
  - **2. Things don't just disappear.** (EH 39.1-2; DRN I 215-224, 238)
  - **3. It's always been this way.** (EH 39.2-6, 44.6-7; DRN II 297-308, V 362-364)
  - **4. It's all just things in space.** (EH 39.7-40.6; DRN I 419-439, V 352-362)
  - **5. All things are made of particles.** (EH 40.7-41.5; DRN I 483-503)
  - **6. Everything extends infinitely.** (EH 41.6-10; DRN I 959-984)
  - **7. Particles and space are unlimited.** (EH 42.1-42.5; DRN I 985-1021, II 339-40, 523-531)
  - **8. Particles have nearly unlimited shapes.** (EH 42.6-42.12; DRN II 341-381)
  - **9. Particles move constantly, even when entangled.** (EH 43.1-44.7; DRN II 309-333)

*"These brief sayings, if all these point are borne in mind afford a sufficient outline for our understanding of the nature of existing things." (EH 45.1)*

- ○ **There are an infinite number of worlds.** (EH 45.3-9)
- **Everything radiates tiny, sensible particles.** (EH 46.1-47.2)
- **Particles are unsurpassably fine and fast.** (EH 47.1-4, 61.11-13)
- **Particles flow at a continuous, instantaneous rate.** (EH 48.1-6)
- **Particles can mix in the air and form illusions.** (EH 48.6-11)
- **We see when particles emanate from things and hit our eyes.** (EH 49.1-50.8)
- **"Truth" is a true opinion about sensations.** (EH 50.8-52.4)
- **We hear when currents of particles stretch into our ears.** (EH 52.5-53.8)
- **We smell when particles waft from things into our noses.** (EH 53.9-53.13)
- **Particles have three qualities: shape, size, and weight.** (EH 54.1-8; DRN II 748-752)
- **Particles have a maximum size.** (EH 55.1-8)
- **Particles have a minimum size.** (EH 56.5-59.12)
- **All positions are relative.** (EH 60.1-12)
- **Particles move with equal speed when falling through the void.** (EH 61.1-10)
- **Particles move imperceptibly, incomprehensibly fast.** (EH 46b.1-3)
- **Particles move even when entangled in compounds.** (EH 62.1-47b.8)

*"Next, referring always to the sensations and the feelings <for in this way you will obtain the most trustworthy ground of belief>, you must consider that..." (EH 63.1-2)*

- ○ **The soul is made of particles.** (EH 63.2-11)
- **The soul gives the body sensation.** (EH 63.11-64.1)
- **The soul lives within the body.** (EH 64.1-10)
- **The body cannot perceive without a soul.** (EH 65.1-8)
- **The soul cannot perceive outside a body.** (EH 65.8-67.9)
- **Only void is incorporeal.** (EH 67.1-68.1)

*"Now if one refers all these reasonings and remembers when was said at the outset, he will see that they are sufficiently embraced in these general formulae to enable him to work out with certainty on this basis the details of the system as well." (EH 68.1-5)*

- ○ **Properties do not exist without bodies** (EH 68.6-69.1)
- **Properties are not incorporeal.** (EH 69.1-69.3)
- **Properties define bodies.** (EH 69.3-69.11)
- **Properties of bodies can change.** (EH 70.1-71.11)
- **Time is neither a body nor a body's property.** (EH 72.1-73.6)
- ○ **Worlds evolved from clumps of particles.** (EH 73.7-73.12)
- **Worlds are similar yet diverse in nature.** (EH 74.1-2)
- **Worlds host other kinds of plants and animals.** (EH 74.2-6)

- **Civilizations evolve over time.** (EH 75.1-2)
- **Languages evolve over time.** (EH 75.6-76.7)
- ○ **“The All” is NOT governed by a divine being.** (EH 76.8-77.5)
- **Celestial objects are just collections of fire.** (EH 77.5-12)
- **Happiness requires a clear understanding of nature.** (EH 78.1-79.1)
- **Obsessing over mythic questions does not lead to happiness.** (EH 79.1-80.3)
- **Conclusions should cohere with evidence.** (EH 80.1-80.11)
- **Confidence is knowing that you are not being dogged by a demon.** (EH 81.1-82.3)
- **Trust your feelings and sensations; apply standards of judgment.** (EH 82.4-82.10)

*“Here [...] is my treatise on the chief points concerning the nature of the general principles, abridged so that my account would be easy to grasp with accuracy.” (EH 82.11-83.2)*

A number of those can be derived (the nature of the soul, the orientation and organization of the world, human evolution and civilization, sensible properties, etc.) from the "first principles".

I am personally curious how many of EH 45-62 get included in their list.