

# Episode 166 - The Lucretius Today Podcast Interviews Dr. David Glidden on "Epicurean Prolepsis"

Post by "Cassius" of March 24, 2023 at 12:35 PM

I think all this is important in how we understand the Democritus quote:

Quote from Democritus

By convention sweet is sweet, bitter is bitter, hot is hot, cold is cold, color is color; but in truth there are only atoms and the void. (trans. Durant 1939)[2].

"Convention" implies "agreement" to most of us, and yes that is true in regard to what word we use for "sweet" - what language we speak. But it is not by agreement with other people that sugar tastes sweet to us - we describe it that way in words, but "in truth" it is nature telling us individually and directly that sugar tastes a desirable way and gives pleasure. That feeling is just as true and real no matter what words we use to describe it, and it exists before we attempt to express anything about the sugar in words.

Democritus' statement as worded is easy to understand as nihilistic - as saying that nothing exists unless we agree it exists other than atoms and void.

Seems to me Epicurus is much more clear about all this (and in fairness to Democritus he might have been too if we had more of his texts).

The important take away is not that only atoms and void have a claim to be considered real, but that for us as humans what has a claim to be real is what nature allows us to perceive through the canonical faculties. That's the opposite of nihilism - it tells us (as against religion that points to another world) that it is THIS world that we perceive through our faculties that is everything to us.