

Episode 168 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 21 - Chapter 10 - The New Freedom 01

Post by "Cassius" of April 1, 2023 at 10:23 PM

Hard to overstate how critical this paragraph is:

Epicurus' response to this is perhaps the least appreciated aspect of his thought. It was to reject reductionist atomism. Almost uniquely among Greek philosophers he arrived at what is nowadays the unreflective assumption of almost anyone with a smattering of science, that there are truths at the microscopic level of elementary particles, and further very different truths at the phenomenal level; that the former must be capable of explaining the latter; but that neither level of description has a monopoly of truth. (The truth that sugar is sweet is not straightforwardly reducible to the truth that it has such and such a molecular structure, even though the latter truth may be required in order to explain the former). By establishing that cognitive scepticism, the direct outcome of reductionist atomism, is self-refuting and untenable in practice, Epicurus justifies his non-reductionist alternative, according to which sensations are true and there are therefore *bona fide* truths at the phenomenal level accessible through them. The same will apply to the *πάθη*, which Epicurus also held to be veridical. Pleasure, for example, is a direct datum of experience. It is commonly assumed that Epicurus must have equated pleasure with such and such a kind of movement of soul atoms; but although he will have taken it to have some *explanation* at the atomic level, I know of no evidence that he, any more than most moral philosophers or psychologists, would have held that an adequate *analysis* of it could be found at that level. Physics are strikingly absent from Epicurus' ethical writings, and it is curious that interpreters are so much readier to import them there than they are when it comes to the moral philosophy of Plato or Aristotle.⁴²

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