

Epicurus' Rejection of "Reductionist Atomism" (And The Related Issues of Skepticism and Determinism)

Post by "Kalosyni" of April 13, 2023 at 10:05 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"He famously denies that perceptible qualities other than shape and size (and, perhaps, weight) really exist in the atoms themselves: one direct quotation surviving from Democritus claims that 'by convention sweet and by convention bitter, by convention hot, by convention cold, by convention color; but in reality atoms and void' (DK 68B9, trans. Taylor 1999a)."

What comes to mind for me is that this claim by Democritus is slightly similar but yet different to the Buddhist "Two Truths" which according to a Tricycle article is: "The doctrine of two truths—the absolute and the relative—holds that there are two ways of viewing the world: as things appear to be, and as they are. In other words, existence is both relative (or conventional) and absolute. The relative or conventional explanation of reality is what we know and experience, while the ultimate or absolute truth is inexpressible, [empty](#) (*sunya*), and lies outside of conventional experience and language. The conventional truth about something is its dependence on conditions. The ultimate truth is its emptiness. This doctrine has its roots in the words of the historical Buddha, who acknowledged that some experiences, in particular nirvana, lie beyond the ability of language to describe."[\(Source\)](#)

I confess that I would need to read more of the Sedley article and a lot more on this to fully understand what Epicurus' stance was. I personally reject any idea of "two truths" (no matter the source) because it leads to meaninglessness and passivity. Yet there is one thing that I do hold to be true which is that the use of language is conventional, and that we must always take that into consideration - language is just a symbol pointing toward reality and it is not reality. Is there any indication of this in Epicurus, that language is understood as conventional?