

Time in Epicurus, Lucretius, and Aristotle

Post by "Don" of September 4, 2023 at 6:02 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Don](#)

passiveness and impassibility, movement and repose, are equally comprised in time.

Don why would Epicurus not simply be talking about the movement of the atoms (either in isolation or in bodies, bodies being the big deal), with no reference to human feeling at that point. If the point of time is that the atoms are changing place, that might make sense (?)

Oh, I see no reason to think Epicurus is primarily talking about the motion of the atoms. He's talking about "the usual expressions" everyone uses about time. Right before the words in question, he's talking about night and day and their parts. I think he's talking about things on the macro level and not the micro level of atoms.

For ease of access, I'm going to copy that section about time from the *Herodotus* here again:

Quote from Epicurus from his letter to Herodotus

[72] "There is another thing which we must consider carefully. We must not investigate time as we do the other accidents which we investigate in a subject, namely, by referring them to the preconceptions envisaged in our minds ; but we must take into account the plain fact itself, in virtue of which we speak of time as long or short, linking to it in intimate connexion this attribute of duration.¹⁰⁶We need not adopt any fresh terms as preferable, but should employ the usual expressions about it. Nor need we predicate anything else of time, as if this something else contained the same essence as is contained in the proper meaning of the word `time' (for this also is done by some). We must chiefly reflect upon that to which we attach this peculiar character of time, and by which we measure it. [73] No further proof is required : we have only to reflect that we attach the attribute of time to days and nights and their parts, and likewise to feelings of pleasure and pain and to neutral states, to states of movement and states of rest, conceiving a peculiar accident of these to be this very characteristic which we express by the word `time.'

Nowhere in that section does he bring up atoms or atomic motion. He's talking about our experience of time in the real world and our "intimate connexion" to it as a duration, long or short. At the end he goes over three things to which "we attach the attribute of time"

1. to days and nights and their parts
 1. ταῖς ἡμέραις καὶ ταῖς νυξὶ συμπλέκομεν καὶ τοῖς τούτων μέρεσιν
2. to "feelings of pleasure and pain" and to "neutral states" (Hicks inadequate translation)
 1. καὶ τοῖς πάθεσι καὶ ταῖς ἀπαθείαις
3. to states of movement and states of rest (again, Hicks inadequate translation)
 1. καὶ κινήσει καὶ στάσεσιν

As for 2, I see no problem *somehow* having it refer to feelings like anger, etc. "I was angry for a short time."

I also maintain that 3's καὶ κινήσει καὶ στάσεσιν refers to kinetic and katastematic pleasure. He doesn't necessarily *need* to be referring to them (rather simply motion and rest in a general sense), but the similarities are enough for me to bring it up.