

# Epicurus, On Nature, Book 34, P.Herc. 1431, col. 16

Post by “Joshua” of May 31, 2024 at 1:16 AM

## Quote

And as for these symmetries and proportions of the pores, or little passages in the organs of the senses, about which they talk so much, and those different mixtures of seeds, which, they say, being dispersed through all savors, odors, and colors, move the senses of different persons to perceive different qualities, do they not manifestly drive them to this, that things are no more of one quality than another? For to pacify those who think the sense is deceived and lies because they see contrary events and passions in such as use the same objects, and to solve this objection, they teach,—that all things being mixed and confounded together, and yet one nevertheless being more suitable and fitting to one, and another to another, it is not possible that there should in all cases be a contact and comprehension of one and the same quality, nor does the object equally affect all with all its parts, every one meeting only those to which it has its sense commensurate and [p. 343] proportioned; so that they are to blame so obstinately to insist that a thing is either good or bad, white or not white, thinking to establish their own senses by destroying those of others; whereas they ought neither to combat the senses,—because they all touch some quality, each one drawing from this confused mixture, as from a living and large fountain, what is suitable and convenient,—nor to pronounce of the whole, by touching only the parts, nor to think that all ought to be affected after one and the same manner by the same thing, seeing that one is affected by one quality and faculty of it, and another by another. Let us then seek who those men are which bring in this opinion that things are not more of one quality than another, if they are not those who hold that every sensible thing is a mixture, composed of all sorts of qualities, like a mixture of new wine fermenting, and who confess that all their rules are lost and their faculty of judging quite gone, if they admit any sensible object that is pure and simple, and do not make each one thing to be many?

‘αἱ δὲ πολυθρύλητοι συμμετρίαι καὶ ἁρμονίαι τῶν περὶ τὰ αἰσθητήρια πόρων αἴ τε πολυμιξία τῶν σπερμάτων, ἃ δὴ πᾶσι χυμοῖς καὶ ὄσμαῖς καὶ χροαῖς ἐνδιεσπαρμένα λέγουσιν ἑτέραν ἑτέρῳ ποιότητος κινεῖν αἴσθησιν, οὐκ ἄντικρυς εἰς τὸ μὴ μᾶλλον τὰ πράγματα συνελάνουσιν αὐτοῖς; τοὺς γὰρ οἰομένους ψεύδεσθαι τὴν αἴσθησιν, ὅτι τάναντία πάθη γιγνόμενα τοῖς χρωμένοις ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν ὀρῶσι, παραμυθούμενοι διδάσκουσιν, ὡς ἀναπεφυρμένων καὶ συμμεμιγμένων ὁμοῦ τι πάντων, ἄλλου δ’ ἄλλῳ πεφυκότος ἐναρμόττειν, οὐκ ἔστι τῆς αὐτῆς ποιότητος ἐπαφή καὶ ἀντίληψις οὐδὲ πᾶσι τοῖς μέρεσι κινεῖ πάντας ὡσαύτως τὸ ὑποκείμενον: ἀλλ’ ἐκείνοις ἕκαστοι μόνοις

έντυγχάνοντες, πρὸς ἃ σύμμετρον ἔχουσι τὴν αἴσθησιν, οὐκ ὀρθῶς διαμάχονται περὶ τοῦ χρηστὸν ἢ πονηρὸν ἢ λευκὸν ἢ μὴ λευκὸν εἶναι τὸ πρᾶγμα, τὰς αὐτῶν οἰόμενοι βεβαιοῦν αἰσθήσεις τῷ τὰς ἄλλων ἀναιρεῖν: δεῖν δ' αἰσθήσει [p. 428] μὲν μηδεμιᾶ μάχεσθαι πᾶσαι γὰρ ἄπτονταί τινος, οἷον ἐκ πηγῆς τῆς πολυμιξίας ἐκάστη λαμβάνουσα τὸ πρόσφορον καὶ οἰκεῖον: ὅλου δὲ μὴ κατηγορεῖν, ἀπτομένους μερῶν, μηδὲ ταύτῃ δεῖν οἶεσθαι πάσχειν ἅπαντας, ἄλλους κατ' ἄλλην ποιότητα καὶ δύναμιν αὐτοῦ πάσχοντας.' ὥρα δὴ σκοπεῖν, τίνες μᾶλλον ἄνθρωποι τὸ μὴ μᾶλλον ἐπάγουσι τοῖς πράγμασιν ἢ οἱ πᾶν μὲν τὸ αἰσθητὸν κρᾶμα παντοδαπῶν ποιότητων ἀποφαίνουσι σύμμικτον ὥστε γλεῦκος αὐλητήριον, ἔρρειν δ' ὁμολογοῦσι τοὺς κανόνας αὐτοῖς καὶ παντάπασιν οἴχεσθαι τὸ κριτήριον, ἄνπερ εἰλικρινὲς αἰσθητὸν ὀτιοῦν καὶ μὴ πολλὰ ἕκαστον ἀπέλιπον.

--Plutarch, [Adversus Colotem](#)

I consulted Sedley's reconstruction of the 37 books *On Nature*, but he writes that there is too little surviving evidence to reconstruct books 16-37. My initial reaction to the phrase *παρὰ τὰς [ἔξ] ἡμῶ[ν]* is that this sounds a lot like the simulacra or eidola of Lucretius' fourth book;

Quote

Lastly those images  
Which to our eyes in mirrors do appear,  
In water, or in any shining surface,  
Must be, since furnished with like look of things,  
Fashioned from images of things sent out.  
There are, then, tenuous effigies of forms,  
Like unto them, which no one can divine  
When taken singly, which do yet give back,  
When by continued and recurrent discharge  
Expelled, a picture from the mirrors' plane.  
Nor otherwise, it seems, can they be kept  
So well conserved that thus be given back  
Figures so like each object.

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So in this reading of the fragment, the atomic films keep their proportion even though the usual case with atoms is a series of repeated collisions that, one would think, would quickly render these films unintelligible. However, Plutarch's mention of the "symmetry (of atom to sense organ; ie scent to the nose, taste to the tongue, etc) *about which they talk so much*" leads me to believe that he is responding directly to Epicurus as quoted in this fragment. I'm not entirely sure I have Plutarch's meaning though.