

Key Citations - The Universe As Infinite In Space - Many Worlds With Life

Post by "Don" of July 16, 2024 at 12:07 PM

I'm going to wade into this fray with a possibly tangential, possibly relevant topic. Y'all be the judge.

I am convinced that the "infinite worlds" that the ancient Epicureans - from the founder to the Romans to the Oenoandans - were envisioning were not of the same structure that we think of in modern cosmology. The cosmos the ancients were envisioning was (let's call it) a "bubble" of Order (literal meaning of "cosmos") surrounded by the primordial Chaos.

Now, the Epicureans did not accept Chaos as an idea or substance, but I do think they substituted (in a manner of speaking) the "infinity" of atoms falling in the void.

However, the cosmos they lived in was composed of the earth they stood on (plate or globe) surmounted by a vault/dome or, alternatively, surrounded by a sphere, that contained the fixed stars, wandering stars (planets), etc. That world-system was a coherent, ordered pocket floating (for lack of a better word) in the *infinite* void. Epicurus posited other pockets of order - other "gatherings of matter" - out there in the vast infinity that would have no contact with his world-system but would nonetheless exist with their own "diverse races of men and tribes of wild beasts." The All - Το Παν ΤΟ ΠΑΝ - contained this infinity of cosmoi.

When we talk of "strange new worlds", we're talking about other planets orbiting distant stars in our galaxy or other galaxies. Maybe we're talking in other universes, but usually we're thinking in our observable universe. This structure, by and large, would have been incoherent to the ancients. Were there some who thought the stars were other Suns with their own Earths? Maybe. But I don't think that was a common view, and I don't think that was Epicurus's view from what I've read.

For me, the big takeaway from Epicurus's teachings on "infinity" and "gods" for my "modern Epicurean" perspective is:

The universe - however it's defined - is physical - either bounded or unbounded, jury is still out - and exists without the aid, support, or creation of any beings - natural or supernatural.

Whether the universe (observable) came into existence out of a larger infinite universe through quantum fluctuations or other physical processes is up for debate, but that doesn't shake my conclusion that all that did exist, exists, or will exist is governed by natural, eventually understandable processes.