

Epicureanism and Scientism: What are the main differences?

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 25, 2024 at 8:21 AM

I think this is a much needed discussion, because those who consider themselves materialists, and study Epicurus, will likely have questions as to science, scientism, vs Epicurean physics.

[Quote from Little Rocker](#)

I just need to look at the text again to see if he's ever like, 'but don't generate implausible explanations just to muddy the water,' or 'but you should feel free to narrow it down to the more probable.' Or, 'sure, there's only one actual best explanation, but we would all do well to recognize our intellectual limitations when it comes to discovering it.'

Here is an excerpt from Letter to Herodotus, which gives us an overview of what Epicurus recommended to his students:

Quote

"For those who are unable to study carefully all my physical writings or to go into the longer treatises at all, I have myself prepared an epitome⁵⁶ of the whole system, Herodotus, to preserve in the memory enough of the [principal doctrines](#),⁵⁷ to the end that on every occasion they may be able to aid themselves on the most important points, so far as they take up the study of Physics. Those who have made some advance in the survey of the entire system ought to fix in their minds under the principal headings an elementary outline of the whole treatment of the subject. For a comprehensive view is often required, the details but seldom.

[36] "To the former, then--the main heads--we must continually return, and must memorize them so far as to get a valid conception of the facts, as well as the means of discovering all the details exactly when once the general outlines are rightly understood and remembered ; since it is the privilege of the mature student to make a ready use of his conceptions by referring every one of them to elementary facts and simple terms. For it is impossible to gather up the results of continuous diligent study of the entirety of things, unless we can embrace in short formulas and hold in mind all that might have been accurately expressed even to the minutest detail.

[37] "Hence, since such a course is of service to all who take up natural science, I, who devote to the subject my continuous energy and reap the calm enjoyment of a life like

this, have prepared for you just such an epitome and manual of the doctrines as a whole.

"In the first place, Herodotus, you must understand what it is that words denote, in order that by reference to this we may be in a position to test opinions, inquiries, or problems, so that our proofs may not run on untested *ad infinitum*, nor the terms we use be empty of meaning. [38] For the primary signification of every term employed must be clearly seen, and ought to need no proving⁵⁸; this being necessary, if we are to have something to which the point at issue or the problem or the opinion before us can be referred.

"Next, we must by all means stick to our sensations, that is, simply to the present impressions whether of the mind or of any criterion whatever, and similarly to our actual feelings, in order that we may have the means of determining that which needs confirmation and that which is obscure.

"When this is clearly understood, it is time to consider generally things which are obscure. To begin with, nothing comes into being out of what is non-existent.⁵⁹ For in that case anything would have arisen out of anything, standing as it would in no need of its proper germs.⁶⁰ [39] And if that which disappears had been destroyed and become non-existent, everything would have perished, that into which the things were dissolved being non-existent. Moreover, the sum total of things was always such as it is now, and such it will ever remain. For there is nothing into which it can change. For outside the sum of things there is nothing which could enter into it and bring about the change.

"Further [*this he says also in the Larger Epitome near the beginning and in his First Book "On Nature"*],...

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