

# What Did the Ancient Epicureans Think Were The Upper And Lower Limits of Atomic Size?

Post by "Cassius" of September 6, 2024 at 11:44 AM

Thanks Bryan. OK - so that's maybe where I got the idea that no atom has ever been perceived by sensation, unless it's also buried somewhere in Lucretius (and my gut tells me it is, at least in passing, or implied in the discussion of images).

The "*never* has an atom been perceived by sensation" strikes me as interesting, as I presume that would be an example of an inference that would appear to me less certain than the inference that none are so large as to consume the universe. THAT one is clear, but I am not sure that it would be safe to conclude that nothing we have ever perceived is a large atom. I don't think Epicurus is suggesting that we have to have perceived an example of something here on earth in order for such a thing to exist elsewhere (so long as it is consistent with other basic physical principals).

"An atom cannot be so large as to be perceived directly by a human" does not strike me as a fundamental of physics. Does it seem that way to anyone? If so, why?

I suppose that we can observe that everything perceptible to us can be divided into smaller particles til a perceptible smallest is reached, but I am not sure why a perceptible smallest could not be an atom itself. Maybe Diogenes Laertius is talking about something in the books we no longer have that was more in the line of speculation, because it doesn't seem to be basic enough to have made it into Herodotus, unless maybe by implication.

None of this is difficult physics, it's all just common sense observation and deduction. But going through it I think gets us closer to the logical way Epicurus was thinking (not only about physics but I would bet everything else as well including "pleasure").