

Welcome Wbernys!

Post by "Cassius" of October 8, 2025 at 10:23 AM

Quote

Lucretius 4-462

Wondrously many other things of this sort we see, all of which would fain spoil our trust in the senses; all in vain, since the greatest part of these things deceives us on account of the opinions of the mind, which we add ourselves, so that things not seen by the senses are counted as seen. For nothing is harder than to distinguish things manifest from things uncertain, which the mind straightway adds of itself.

I think the posts above have done a good job of responding to the size of the sun concern, so I'll add only how I fit all this together in my mind:

Epicurus' main concern was fighting against those who think that their minds can impose their will and take precedence over nature. All "measurement" issues essentially come down to imposing units of measure that we construct in our own minds, and the confusion arises when we begin to think that our mental processes are superior to reality. Thus the ultimate issue to Epicurus was not to be a technician and measure things by a certain number of units, but to point out that units are our construction, and we should always follow nature, not our own constructions.

As to particles being open to "infinite division," that can be dismissed as a possibility because if things could be divided infinitely there would never be anything firm which maintains its own properties, but we see that properties do have regularity, so infinite divisibility is impossible.

As to possibility of particles being "infinitely large," the reverse is the case, because an infinitely large particle would consume the universe, and we also see that that is not so.

As to the universe as a whole being bounded in size, that is also not possible definitionally, because being bounded means there is an edge, and there can be no edge where there is "nothing" on the other side.

Time likewise is not measured in units except as to our imposing an arbitrary measure on it, and for that purpose any arbitrary measurement such as we commonly use (days, hours, minutes) is suitable, just so long as you don't get the idea that those units are established and enforced by nature.

As to the size of the sun, the answers such as Eikadistes gave seems to me to be correct.

The important thing to Epicurus is not to establish a specific measurement, but to make a properly-understood "man is the measurer of all things" point that all measurements are arbitrarily assigned by us, and to have any usefulness must be in accord with our sensations, as our sensations ("how things appear to be") are ultimately all we have to work with. We use our minds to analyze "illusory" phenomena such as discussed at length in Lucretius Book 4, but the constant problem is that we begin to think that our minds are the authority rather than the data we receive from the senses.

There's nothing more important than to keep in mind that we are not the masters of nature. Nature is the mother of all things, and we have to constantly fight the temptation to think that we can change that.

"The sun is the size that it appears to be" is a way of reinforcing that lesson in very stark terms. It's so effective that we're still debating it two thousand years later.

I don't agree with every detail of the Gellar-Goad article but I think he's correct that Epicurus tended to like to use very confrontational statements like this. We tend to see them in every important area of the philosophy, physics, canonics, and ethics.

Quote

[VS29](#). (Bailey) "In investigating nature I would prefer to speak openly and like an oracle to give answers serviceable to all mankind, even though no one should understand me, rather than to conform to popular opinions and so win the praise freely scattered by the mob."