

Is Motion One Of The Three Eternal Properties of Atoms? I.E. Are The Three Properties Shape, Size, and MOTION?

Post by "Cassius" of March 26, 2026 at 10:20 AM

This topic was also discussed in a recent zoom meeting. The answer appears debatable, and I see that Sedley's article "Epicurean Anti-Reductionism" has this to say (see especially footnote 29):

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But being rather to body and space as such, at any level (3.4) — its weight, size, tangibility etc. to body, yielding and intangibility to space (Lucretius 4.119). Demetrius of Laconia (and above it also seen to below) *shape*, and void are, after all, *unsharable, or indivisible, or lacking all individual properties*.⁵⁰ And since the essential properties of atoms are void are knowable primarily through analogy with sensible bodies, Epicurus would tend to think of these as the shared properties of all bodies (for the specific case of tangibility and intangibility, see below). Thus it is that the microscopic ontology of Epicurean physics sees a rather unambiguous position in Epicurean metaphysics.

Next, we can take the mainly negative description of these properties' mode of existence — most of the points made apparently applying to both terms. They are not to be thought of either as bodily parts (3.11), or as incorporeals (6.7, 16); these being notions primarily appropriate to *per se* or accidents in point made explicitly for "incorporeal" at 29. 14b) 47). But they certainly exist. Epicurus does show how the Democritean extreme of making them unreal, and the Stoic extreme of having their accidents at the price of making them bodily parts. In the case of permanent properties, they are perhaps parts of a unit — explicitly not material parts (3.12), but something more like conceptual parts (11-16).⁵¹ What does this amount to? One might be tempted to

⁵⁰ This already leaves some leeway with Demetrius of Laconia's *shape* and *void*, both unsharable (but *shape* is *sharable*), *shape* and *void* are *unsharable* (but *shape* is *sharable*). The *unsharable* is in a technical sense, which one does not mean at the microscopic level (but it might include the same point microscopic, and their respect to it is impossible, in which one does it as has not impossible property which seems to me that with all bodies (and) might be their individuality).

⁵¹ Epicurus seems to be able to be the modes of conceptual parts (14, 15, 21, 29), by contrast with Aristotle (2), an opposite of material parts (51, 56). See, if it is 47), where, apparently, relating

Here is the translation from Demetrius Lacon cited on page 306:

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the sense of having in interpretation of Epicurus as making size an "accident of accidents", Demetrius "ex-ponit" (Epicurus) as follows:

"Of things that exist some exist *per se* or which others are said to belong to *per se* things. What exist *per se* are things like the substances (atoms), namely body and void, while what are viewed as belonging to *per se* things are what they call "properties" (accidents). Of these properties some are inseparable from the things of which they are properties, others are of a kind to be separated from them. Inseparable from the things of which they are properties are, for example, extension from body and non-extension from void. For body is inseparable without resistance, and so is void without non-resistance; these are permanent properties of each — resisting of the one, yielding of the other. Not inseparable from the things of which they are properties are, for example, motion and rest. For compound bodies are neither always in continual motion nor always at rest, but sometimes have the property of motion, sometimes of rest (although the atom in itself is in everlasting motion, since it must approach either void or body and if it should approach void it would through it because of its non-resistance, while if it should approach body it resists and moves away from it because of its resistance). Hence, the things which time accompanies are accidents... I mean day, night, heat, summer and winter and lightning, motion and rest. For day and night are accidents of the surrounding air...".⁵²

This could hardly be clearer:

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existing things
├── per se substances
│   ├── bodies
│   └── void
└── properties (accidents)
    ├── inseparable
    └── not inseparable (= accidents)
        └── (29) (7) (8) (9)
    
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⁵² 15c) 220-224.