

Welcome Morgan!

Post by "Cassius" of April 17, 2026 at 10:56 AM

Morgan writes us:

Hello, I'm delighted to become a new member, and as far as I can see, I should respond to my welcome message, and whilst I'm pretty sure this may not be the way to do so, I can't identify a 'reply' button, so forgive the rough and ready attempt to do so.

All advice welcome. Meanwhile, I have a burning question...

My understanding is that Epicurus as a young boy was precocious to the point of questioning an early teacher to explain Hesiod's conception of chaos. I would love to flesh out the description given in De Witt...albeit apocryphal!

with many thanks,

While Epicurus may have begun his schooling under his father's instruction, there is evidence that he was placed in charge of another teacher before he was of an age for the higher branches. The following anecdote has been preserved for us by Sextus Empiricus: "For while still quite a young lad he demanded to know of his teacher, who was dictating to him the line 'Verily first of all chaos was created,'²⁴ out of what chaos was created if it really was first created." When the teacher with some irritation denied that it was any of his business to teach such things but rather of the men called philosophers, "Then," said Epicurus, "to the philosophers I must hie if they alone really know the truth about realities." ²⁵

The interest of the story is threefold: it exhibits Epicurus in the process of receiving the orthodox schooling in Greek poetry. If at the time mentioned he was learning his Hesiod, it is certain he had already acquired a due familiarity with Homer. It will be shown later that

An extract from the chapter, SAMOS AND ATHENS, in De Witt's *Epicurus and his Philosophy*

"The third item of interest attaches to the mention of chaos. In Democritean physics there was no place for chaos. According to this system, the world had always been a cosmos, because the atoms and void were believed to exist from everlasting unto everlasting. Only in creational systems was there need for an initial state of chaos. Thus the question naturally arises, Was Epicurus already at the time of the incident reading Democritus? An affirmative answer is not absurd. By a scholar named Ariston, whose reputation is good, it was recorded in a *Life of Epicurus* that he began to study philosophy at the age of twelve.²⁷ He was undoubtedly precocious; this is the point that Ariston was making and he adds "that he headed his own school at thirty-two," which contrasted with forty for Plato and thirty-nine for Aristotle when he

began to teach in Mytilene. If to the above item be added a second to the effect that

Epicurus, "chancing upon the books of Democritus, took eagerly to philosophy," It becomes quite probable that he already knew something of Democritus when he cornered his teacher on the topic of chaos."