Key Citations On Atoms, Void, and Emergence

Post by “Cassius” of July 22, 2026 at 6:09 AM

From Tau Phi's recent collection on the works of Metrodorus I want to add this here under a list of quotes relevant to emergence.

It is pretty confusingly worded, or confusingly translated, or both, but it seems to me to be pretty clearly talking about a mixture of canonics (*thinking to establish their own senses by destroying those of others*) and emergence (*seeing that one is affected by one quality and faculty of it, and another by another.*)

PLUTARCH, Against Colotes, 5, 1109 c [5]

And as for these symmetries and proportions of the pores, or little passages in the organs of the senses, about which they talk so much, and those different mixtures of seeds, which, they say, being dispersed through all savors, odors, and colors, move the senses of different persons to perceive different qualities, do they not manifestly drive them to this, that things are no more of one nature than another? For to pacify those who think the sense is deceived and lies because they see contrary events and passions in such as use the same objects, and to solve this objection, they teach,—that when almost everything was confused and mixed up together, since it has been arranged by Nature that one thing shall fit another thing, it was not the contact or the apprehension of the same quality nor were all parts affected in the same way by what was influencing them. But those only coalesced with anything to which they had a characteristic, symmetrical in a corresponding proportion; so that they are in error so obstinately to insist that a thing is either good or bad, white or not white, thinking to establish their own senses by destroying those of others; whereas they ought neither to combat the senses,—because they all touch some quality, each one drawing from this confused mixture, as from a living and large fountain, what is suitable and convenient,—nor to pronounce of the whole, by touching only the parts, nor to think that all ought to be affected after one and the same manner by the same thing, seeing that one is affected by one quality and faculty of it, and another by another. Let us investigate who those men are which bring in this opinion that things are not more of one quality than another, if they are not those who affirm that every sensible object is a mixture, compounded of all sorts of qualities, like a mixture of new wine fermenting, and who confess that all their rules are lost and their faculty of judging quite gone, if they admit any sensible object that is pure and simple, and do not make each one thing to be many?