

God and the Atom by Victor Stenger: A Very Brief Review

Post by "Cassius" of February 22, 2020 at 2:34 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

But I ramble. I'm with you in hoping that somebody who has seriously studied this subject unpacks this at some point!

As for who that person might be, I am not sure that it will necessarily be someone who spends a lifetime studying physics.

I was thinking about this again tonight and it seems to me that we have to think about what kind of proof would be required for us to say that the questions is really settled. Given our human nature would/will/should we ever accept anything less on **any** question other than "I know because I was there and I saw/experienced it for myself" from someone we deem to be trustworthy?

Which, if so, is obviously never going to happen in astronomy, or in issues like what happened XXX number of billion years ago. We can't even really gain a lot of confidence nowadays about many aspects of what happened 50 years ago, and you could lower the number of years to a lot less than that.

So given the difficulties and the inherent limitations of our lack of personal experience, we probably do have to start with issues of "epistemology." That's an area which we don't have nearly the amount of Epicurean texts that once existed, and which we need to reconstruct to the best of our ability based on what's left and probably a thorough analysis of the method of thinking presented in Lucretius.

Which leads me back to confirming my personal opinion that I really don't want to get too strung out taking specific positions on what physics theories or theorists might be persuasive prospects or dead ends before we really have a good statement of the level and type of proof - the rules of evidence - that we should bring to the entire discussion. Getting too wrapped up in details before addressing that bigger picture probably just leads to endless dispute and even hard feelings, neither of which help anything and leave us worse off than when we started.

But that leaves us back with the question of what to do in the meantime, and back to such basic issues as "trusting the senses" and what to do and how to think in the absence of evidence that is conflicting and/or simply not sufficient. And there are good Epicurean texts that need to be brought to bear on those questions, including:

22. We must consider both the real purpose, and all the evidence of direct perception, to which we always refer the conclusions of opinion; otherwise, all will be full of doubt and confusion.

23. If you fight against all sensations, you will have no standard by which to judge even those of them which you say are false.

24. If you reject any single sensation, and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion, as to the appearance awaiting confirmation, and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations, as well, with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong.

25. If on each occasion, instead of referring your actions to the end of nature, you turn to some other, nearer, standard, when you are making a choice or an avoidance, your actions will not be consistent with your principles.