

References to Epicurus' Attitude Toward The "Place of the Sciences And Liberal Arts"

Post by "Godfrey" of July 18, 2020 at 2:35 AM

Quote

It doesn't matter as long as I accept a non-supernatural explanation but don't get hung up on the "right" answer. That doesn't appeal to me. I personally enjoy contemplating this kind of thing, reading about theories, having my brain twisted in a pretzel by quantum physics, string theory, black holes, etc. I don't fear these phenomena. So does that lack of fear matter here?

Don, this is a really short reply to a question that deserves more, but I think this statement of yours (if I'm reading it right) is a good illustration of not getting hung up on the "right" answer. Is string theory absolutely correct? Are multiverses fact? These are ideas of *theoretical* physics and they may or may not be correct; they haven't yet been proven to be true or false. But are you going to study these until you can prove their correctness? If not, then you're not getting hung up on the right answer. If you enjoy the mental gymnastics involved in contemplating these ideas (I do, until I don't) there's nothing anti-Epicurean about that until it starts to drive you batty.

Proven and observable science is another matter entirely. But my take is that Epicurus was dealing with theorizing, as he didn't have the technology to verify many of his conclusions. So rather than spend his life trying to prove that, say, lightning is caused by x but not y or z, he was satisfied that any of x, y or z could be proven correct. Since he worked out all of these from logic based on observation, consistent with his overall theory (atoms and void), it wouldn't matter which might turn out to be correct. When it came to his "big picture" theories I wouldn't expect him to be so loosey-goosey.

For us, I think it comes down to the distinction between experimental and theoretical physics. Experimental physics is verifiable and doesn't typically allow for multiple explanations, while theoretical physics deals with currently unverifiable ideas. Theoretical physics is where you can play with multiple explanations but not get hung up on the "right" answer.

That turned out rather verbose for a "really short reply"!