

Infinity and the Expanding Universe

Post by “Don” of July 24, 2020 at 7:36 AM

I wanted to go back to the original of [Cassius](#) 's underlined quote there:

Quote

μάλιστα δὲ σεαυτὸν ἀπόδος εἰς τὴν τῶν ἀρχῶν καὶ ἀπειρίας καὶ τῶν συγγενῶν τούτοις
θεωρίαν

This is interesting because it includes θεωρίαν which means "contemplation, consideration." This is the same word used in the [characteristics of the sage that gets translated "take joy in public spectacles"](#) but refers to speculation, etc., in the mental sense in Epicurus. So, Epicurus is encouraging Pythokles to most importantly set out yourself on the contemplation of these things.

The word meaning infinite in this list is ἀπειρίας, literally ἀ "un, not" + πειρίας "bounded, limited". [Wikipedia had an infinity article](#) which mentions the Greek attitude to the concept. [The LSJ had a definition](#) that includes mention of Aristotle and there Stoics use of this concept, so we always have to keep in mind whether Epicurus was using the term on its own or as a reaction to another school.

My take recently was that something doesn't need to be literally infinite for us humans to consider it so. An example is the task of counting of all [the grains of sand on every beach and in every desert on Earth](#). Sure, that's a finite number but for all intents and purposes it might as well be infinite in relation to a human lifespan.

I think we need to be careful, too, about assigning modern mathematical concepts of infinity to classical Greeks. Our scientific notion may be similar but not identical to theirs.