

Infinity and the Expanding Universe

Post by "Don" of July 24, 2020 at 6:02 PM

[Cassius](#) had some comments above that I wanted to comment on, so I'll include them all here. Most are "Amen, ho adelphos mou (my brother)!" and others I wanted to riff on.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

My personal take is that Epicurus is stressing the need to think about and get comfortable with the idea that there are certain things that are very difficult to get our minds around. He's saying that instead of defaulting to some mystical attitude that "it must be god/divine/magical," we should come to terms with the limits of our capabilities and get comfortable with making decisions within that scope, with is itself a very desirable thing to be good at.

Fully agree. It's that "limits" concept again that has a stream running through the philosophy. I also think Epicurus stresses again and again the material nature of reality with no need to default to the supernatural or mystical forces. And agreed that getting comfortable within one's limits is a positive thing, recognizing those limits, but also expanding those limits and one's understanding. Epicurus seemed to encourage students to study the doctrines and expand from the summary/epitome phase to the comprehensive view (i.e., the 37 books of *On Nature*) while never losing sight of the summary versions and using those to keep your knowledge fresh *and* using that to be able to explain the philosophy succinctly and clearly.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

an important distinction between "uncountable because we don't have the time or ability" (the grains of sand on the beach) vs. "uncountable because it in fact has no limit on the number of instances" (the number of stars or planets or whatever in the universe).

I'm not sure I understand what you're getting at here. I would include the grains of sand, the stars in the sky, and the number of molecules in one's body in that first category. I'm not sure I know what you mean by "instances". And, in fact, all those things are "countable" at least "estimate-able" using extensions of our senses and/or extrapolating using mathematics (e.g., a grain of sand is this big...; planets tend to form around this kind of star and there are this many stars...., etc.). My version of unlimited/infinite comes down to the average humans ability to both count and comprehend these enormous numbers. Which goes back to your point, I believe, about context and what audience one is talking to.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's why personally for me when we discuss (in the podcasts for example) that it doesn't matter whether the heat death of the universe theory is correct or not, because the time span is too great to be of **relevance** to us, I personally don't find that a satisfactory place to stop. I don't think Epicurus would have accepted (or suggest that we should entertain) any theory as possible which would postulate that anything could go to nothing, or come from nothing, much less the universe as a whole.

That's not exactly my take - i.e., its being relevant to us - on this topic. Let me expand on my thoughts on this one: I don't think it's a place to stop investigating. And details of all the cosmological theories are still to be worked out! And as I mentioned earlier, that "heat death" is only for our own little "pocket universe". The bigger multiverse stays "here" eternal and unchanging to paraphrase Epicurus. My take on the concept's "relevance" to us humans is that the timespans are SO mind-bendingly huge that - for all intents and purposes - the universe *is* "infinite" in relation to us even though its actual lifespan is (most likely) finite. Scientists have "seen" (with extensions of their senses) space expanding and the broad consensus is that it will keep expanding until the last bit of energy is spent. But that is SO far off in the future - relative to us - that even our far-off descendants or the descendants of the sentient squids that come after us will be long gone. BUT that doesn't negate Epicurus's fundamental Canon and material-based, non-supernatural Physics relative to us with respect to our situation in the here and now.

Also, I should say, I don't necessarily buy the idea of parallel universes where there are infinite numbers of "me" all living slightly different or radically different lives (a la *Rick and Morty* for those familiar with that animated series). I do find the idea of multiple universes existing side by side in the wider multiverse, all with radically different laws of physics or whatnot, intriguing. As long as there aren't multiple me's roaming around, I can *almost* wrap my head around that.

More to follow... Enjoying this thread! (Does it show? 😊)