

Stoic Objections to Epicurean Doctrine on Infinity of The Universe

Post by "Cassius" of August 31, 2020 at 11:44 AM

Yes he's using a Stoic argument here:

Lucretius does not identify the proponents of this theory, and over the years various candidates have been proposed. The common, and in my opinion the most plausible, view is that Lucretius was thinking of the Stoics.²⁹ Although several ancient philosophers and schools of philosophy endorsed some kind of centripetal gravity, only the Stoics deployed this theory in order to safeguard the integrity of a single and finite cosmos in infinite space, and only they extended this centripetal tendency to all bodies, heavy and light alike. Other proposed candidates, like Aristotle or the early Platonists, simply rejected extra-cosmic space, and therefore did not have to account for the coherence of the cosmos as such, or to counterbalance the centrifugal tendency of air and fire with a centripetal one.³⁰ However, although Lucretius probably had the Stoics in mind, this does not necessarily mean that he understood

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or represented their theory correctly in every respect. The clearest ancient testimony as to the Stoic theory in question is preserved by Stobaeus:

In the case of all things in the cosmos that have a *hêxis* of their own the parts tend towards the centre of the whole thing. Similarly in the case of the cosmos itself; and it is in virtue of this fact that it is rightly said that all parts of the cosmos have a tendency to move towards the centre of the cosmos, most of all the things possessing weight. The same thing is responsible both for the immobility of the cosmos in the infinite void and for the earth's immobility in the cosmos, as it is situated around the centre of it [viz. of the cosmos] in a state of equal balance. Still it is not unrestrictedly so that body has weight, but air and fire are weightless. However, also these elements tend towards the centre of the whole globe of the cosmos, although they find their relative position in the direction of the periphery of the cosmos. For by their own nature they are upward moving because they don't have any share in weight.³¹

According to the Stoics, just as individual things within the cosmos are held together by a cohesive force or *hêxis*, so the cosmos as a whole has a *hêxis*, which causes all its parts to converge on its centre. This tendency is felt most strongly by the heaviest parts, which take up a more central position, but less by the weightless bodies, which therefore move towards, and settle at, the periphery.