

Creative Assistance Needed! "The Twelve Days of Class With Epicurus"

Post by "Cassius" of January 4, 2020 at 7:54 PM

OK Friends, this is both a promise and a threat. 😊 Unless I get some creative assistance with this, you are eventually going to hear me sing this, and I promise that would be painful. I am sure some of you can do much better, and have better suggestions for rewording / rephrasing, before we get to that point.

However, this is a starting point, based on Norman DeWitt's reconstruction of [Epicurus Twelve Fundamentals of Nature](#). Of course the final product must be something that can be sung to "the twelve days of Christmas" keeping as close to the fundamental points made by Epicurus as possible. Obviously also in this project a singer would really have to be flexible in singing the words at a pace that would fit the music.

Here is my first effort. If I can get some help we will spread credit (or blame) around appropriately! ---->

The Twelve Days of Class With Epicurus

On the first day of class Epicurus taught to me:

Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the second day of class Epicurus taught to me:

No thing can be split to nothing, and

Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the third day of class Epicurus taught to me:

Every thing is made of atoms and void,

No thing can be split to nothing, and

Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the fourth day of class Epicurus taught to me:

Atoms in a body can be more than one type,

Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the fifth day of class Epicurus taught to me:

There's no limit to the number of atoms,
Atoms in a body can be more than one type,
Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the sixth day of class Epicurus taught to me:

There's no limit to the size of the void,
There's no limit to the number of atoms,
Atoms in a body can be more than one type,
Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the seventh day of class Epicurus taught to me:

The atoms are always in motion,
There's no limit to the size of the void,
There's no limit to the number of atoms,
Atoms in a body can be more than one type,
Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the eighth day of class Epicurus taught to me:

The speed of all the atoms is the same,
The atoms are always in motion,
There's no limit to the size of the void,
There's no limit to the number of atoms,
Atoms in a body can be more than one type,
Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the ninth day of class Epicurus taught to me:

The atoms move in lines and also bounce,
The speed of all the atoms is the same,
The atoms are always in motion,
There's no limit to the size of the void,
There's no limit to the number of atoms,
Atoms in a body can be more than one type,
Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the tenth day of class Epicurus taught to me:

Atoms can swerve at any point or time,
The atoms move in lines and also bounce,
The speed of all the atoms is the same,
The atoms are always in motion,
There's no limit to the size of the void,
There's no limit to the number of atoms,

Atoms in a body can be more than one type,
Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the eleventh day of class Epicurus taught to me:

Atoms have a weight a shape and size,
Atoms can swerve at any point or time,
The atoms move in lines and also bounce,
The speed of all the atoms is the same,
The atoms are always in motion,
There's no limit to the size of the void,
There's no limit to the number of atoms,
Atoms in a body can be more than one type,
Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

On the twelfth day of class Epicurus taught to me:

The atom shapes are not numbered nor in-fi-nite,
Atoms have a weight a shape and size,
Atoms can swerve at any point or time,
The atoms move in lines and also bounce,
The speed of all the atoms is the same,
The atoms are always in motion,
There's no limit to the size of the void,
There's no limit to the number of atoms,

Atoms in a body can be more than one type,
Every thing is made of atoms and void,
No thing can be split to nothing, and
Nothing can be made from no-thing.

Can anyone offer assistance or suggestions?

(No, "forget the project" isn't acceptable, and won't save you in the end, because I intend to incorporate some form of this into eventual podcasting to go through these hugely important aspects of Epicurean philosophy.)

Post by "Cassius" of January 4, 2020 at 10:20 PM

Thanks Oscar!

on this one -

[Quote from Oscar](#)

"Atoms in a body can be more than one type" to "atom's types are plenty"

I was afraid I was already getting to far away from what appears to be the point:

[PN 04](#) "Solid bodies are either compounds or simple."

I need to look back at the intent of that one, which seems to be separate and distinct from

PN 12 - "The number of the different shapes is not infinite, merely innumerable."

In other words, it may be that 4 is making such a different point than 12 that it might not be appropriate simply to say "there are lots of different types of atoms. Without going back to DeWitt as I type this, I seem to remember that he was thinking that it was important to Lucretius / Epicurus to note the existence of heaps of atoms of the same type, such as "pure gold" or anything else composed of a single element. Now offhand I can't think of what the significance of that would be, but I'll go back to dewitt and see what I can find, and also compare the letter to Herodotus and try to find the section in Lucretius that would involve this issue.

I definitely remember reading the part about why the atoms can't be infinite in shape - because we know that the shapes don't get large enough for us to observe a single atom -- everything that rises to what we see (is this the meaning of the "shores of light phrase"?) can be split, so I think that's the observation that proves the rule that a single atom itself never rises to the size of being visible.

But following on our recent conversation about how Epicurus was intent on his anti-Platonism, there may be a reason why it would be important to note that a visible body may be composed of atoms of only a single type.

Anyone have any ideas?

Note: It's possible that DeWitt has this wrong, since his is a reconstruction, but again I need to check the text.....

Post by "Cassius" of January 4, 2020 at 10:23 PM

Ok I did not remember this exactly as I find it now:

These examples will suffice to show that the Twelve Principles are treated as theorems to be demonstrated and that the logical procedure is not inductive or empirical. The fourth principle, however, that solid bodies are either compounds or simple, deserves mention both for its intrinsic importance and for the light it throws on the use of the epitome. In the Little Epitome it is briefly asserted that, if matter is not going

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to be annihilated, there must be ultimate bodies which are indivisible, unchangeable, and capable of surviving when compound bodies are broken up; they must be solid, that is, have no void in them. If the student desires further information, he is referred to the Big Epitome or the fourteenth and fifteenth of the books on Physics.⁸

It need hardly be added that the word *atom* means "indivisible" and is neuter or feminine, the nouns *stocheion*, "element," or *physis*, "existence," being supplied as the case requires; Epicurus does not himself use *ousia*, "existence" of the atom.

Footnote 8 is to Diogenes Laertius 10.40-41 which may not be of much help.

Post by "Cassius" of January 4, 2020 at 10:37 PM

This reminds me that I am aware that Diskin Clay, to mention one commentator, came up with a different version of the twelve than did DeWitt. I will paste here the clips that I have on that and also upload the full article. Clay's version does not make the point stated by DeWitt in his number 4.

I have personally been disposed to reject Mr. Clay's version because he counts ten principles of physics, and then to round out the twelve (a number I understand was referenced as a book title in Diogenes Laertius) he considers the first two of the PD's (about gods and death) to be the last two of the twelve. That does not sound convincing to me. I could see a stretched

argument that PD1 might have some physics implication, but not PD2. This material will help in analysing the DeWitt material however.

Also, I remember some commentator somewhere saying that Clay's version was "more careful" than that of DeWitt. However as I read back over these I think Dewitt was probably correct in thinking that the twelve principles were very specifically related to the nature of the atoms,

Στοιχειώσεις (44.9 Σ). It is placed among them by the scholiast to the *Letter to Herodotus*¹⁸. These 10 *stoicheiomata* of the *Letter to Herodotus*, together with the first two remedies of Epicurus' τετραφάρμικος (ΚΔ I and II) they are the only originals in Epicurus' Greek (as much of it as survives) which have been translated into the Latin of the *De Rerum Natura*. Given the terms of Epicurus' last will and testament, it is proper to see Lucretius, and not Hermarchus, as his principal beneficiary.

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The ten *stoicheiomata* are:

<i>Letter to Herodotus</i>	<i>De Rerum Natura</i>
1. Nothing comes into being out of nothing. 38.8—39.1	I 145—150, 159—160
2. Nothing is reduced to nothing. 39.1—2	I 215—218, 237
3. The universe always was as it is and always will be. 39.2—5	II 294—307; V 359—363
4. The universe is made up of bodies and void. 39.6—40.2	I 418—428

¹⁸ This same *Scholion* connects the Epicurean axiom of change with the nine other *stoicheiomata* set out early in the *Letter to Herodotus*, 44.6—10. The syllogistic form of this axiom is also distinctive and characteristic of Epicurus' manner of presenting the *stoicheiomata*.

5. Bodies are atoms and their compounds.
40.7—9 I 483—486
6. The universe is infinite.
41.6—10 I 958—964, 1001
7. Atoms are infinite in number and space extends without limit.
41.11—42.4 I 1008—1020
8. Atoms of similar shape are infinite in number, but the variety of their shapes is indefinite, not infinite.
42.10—43.4 II 522—527
9. Atomic motion is constant and of two kinds.
43.5—44.1 II 95—102 (I 952)
10. Atoms share only three of the characteristics of sensible things: shape, weight, mass.
54.3—6 II 748—752

Στοιχείον (*elementum*) is the basis of the term which Epicurus used to describe the manner in which he presented his physiology to Herodotus. Στοιχείωσις and its product, στοιχειώματα, are terms which were new to Greek (in so far as we know) and first attested in the *Letter to Herodotus*¹⁹. But the process of reduction, refinement, and simplification which the term *stoicheiosis* describes appears to have been a major trend in the scientific thought of the IV century as it was known to Proclus in the V century A.D.

(On a personal note I should say I have a high regard for Diskin Clay because shortly after I starting studying Epicurus I wrote him a letter - maybe about 2011; obviously before he died - and he was gracious enough to write me a nice note in response, so I will always be appreciative of that.)

Here is the full article from which these two pages come:

File

[Diskin Clay: Epicurus' Last Will and Testament](#)

Epicurus' Last Will and Testament
by Diskin Clay (diskin@epicurus.org)

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For more information on this article, please visit the following link: <https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1350-creative-assistance-needed-the-twelve-days-of-class-with-epicurus/>

The title of this article is very figuratively written, and the subject is not at all focused narrowly on Epicurus' last will, but much more broadly on Epicurus' general legacy, with a lot of attention to physics.



Cassius

January 4, 2020 at 10:41 PM

Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2020 at 10:30 AM

Oscar I am am very interested in anything you would suggest!

Before I made the first set of suggestions I should have gone back and studied the format of the music, because now I am remembering that it seems many of the gifts were very short "five golden rings" (?) and I wasn't remembering accurately how the lines fit together to go with the flow.

If you are so inclined any ideas that you have would be welcome. I do think that using this a a memory device would be very useful.

Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2020 at 11:02 AM

You are very correct Oscar - I just reviewed the original and each line is going to need to be much more compact than I have written it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyEyMjdD2uk>

Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2020 at 11:19 AM

I looked at some more of the youtube versions of this song. Even if each line needs to truncated severely, it should be easy to fill in the gaps with a slide show / graphic illustrating each principle in much more full form. Then the song line can become the memory device for the full doctrine illustrated in in the picture, kind of like with the Tetrpharmakon

Post by “Joshua” of January 5, 2020 at 2:09 PM

This actually relates to a small project I've had cooking.

I'm adapting the lyrics of "Northwest Passage" by Stan Rogers to an Epicurean theme. I don't know why, but the song felt perfect for it. It has an energy, a spirit of adventure, and a sense of history suitable to practical philosophy.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=TVY8LoM47xI>

Progress so far;

Ah, for just one time, I would take passage to Hellas,
To feel the wind from Samos sigh from the Aegean Sea,
Tracing that lost line in the steps of Epicurus,
And bring his garden back across the sea.
Westward from Vesuvius 'tis there 'twas said to lie
A villa of philosophy in which so many died
Seeking peace and pleasure,
Leaving scattered, broken souls
And a long-forgotten library of scrolls.

I'm having fun with it!

Post by “Cassius” of January 5, 2020 at 4:37 PM

Oscar I personally am MUCH more comfortable with graphics, in which I have the ability to make effort, even if not much talent, vs the musical part, at which I have no talent or aptitude whatever. So anything you can piece together on the music side I am happy to work on graphics for.