Highlights and doubts after reading Chapter 1 (Part 1 of 2)

Post by “Mathitis Kipouros” of July 5, 2020 at 7:25 PM

Just some things I've gotten out of it. Some remarks so people who haven't read it perhaps get a feeling of what it includes (witout any promise of comprehensiveness, these are just things I highlighted for myself) and some doubts (that I'll be marking with bold type) I'd like to bring to the forum to see if they can be resolved.

- P4 "The gods are not to be feared, because 'the incorruptible being is immune to feelings of anger or gratitude'". Keeping this attitude will put the reader in "the right disposition to learn subsequent teachings".
- P4 Epicurus employs the synoptic view as a device to facilitate teaching/learning, that goes from the general view to the details.
- P4 "The universe consists of atoms and void" so the soul is composed of atoms. **Is somebody willing to ellaborate on this point?**
- P4 Epicurus believed that the the truth can be properly described in terms of its details, parting from the whole, and only if "the beginning was rightly made", and so knowledge can be attained.
- P5 The first text for students of Epicurs was "The Little Epitome, which is extant as the letter addressed to Herodotus".
- P5 "Faith was recognized for the first time as a factor in happiness". **I guess this will be expanded upon later in the book, but... why does faith play such an important role in Epicurean Philosophy? How is this not contradictory to its materialistic ontology and its empiricist epistemology?**
- P5 The poem of Lucretius "On the Nature of Things" is the follow-up text for the student after "the Little Epitome".
- P5 The nature of gods, which is presumed to be the topic of the book missing from Lucretiu's poem. **What is Epicurean Philosophy's stance on this topic since there is no extant text about it? Or there is?**
- P5 There is a mention about "the thirty-seven books on Physics". **What is this referring to?**
- P5 The synoptic view of Epicurus and his philosophy are "presented in the form of *dogmatic* general statements". **From my first reading, I remembered some reference about the value of dogma, but I don't know if its this one or another one later on. Dogma doesn't strike me as a constructive thing, let alone in philosophy; is this something that is just asked of the reader at the beginning because of the synoptic view, or is dogma a particularly important part of the**

philosophy?

- P6 The stated objectives of the chapter are "to show where Epicurus belongs in the succession of philosophers, how his tought is related to the cultural context in which it arose, and how it survived in the cultural context into which it was finally absorbed", "to orientate the reader at the outset as to create the proper attitude for a sympathetic understanding of the man and his work; and not less to warn the reader against the disparagement and prejudice that abound in all the secondary literature".
- P6 Diogenes Laertius wrote an "excellent biography of Epicurus" and it is used as "chief authority" on his life.
- P7 "He was the first to promulgate a dogmatic philosophy" ... "The distinction of being a dogmatist was naturally not denied him, because it was deemed a demerit, the renunciation of inquiry". **This is the part I was referring to (in my comment lines above); I too think that dogmatism is a reunciation of inquiry; how is this not in agreement with Dewitt? Am I understanding something wrong? Why does he propose dogmatism as an argument in favor of the philosophy.**
- P7 Epicurs epistemology is not empiricist in the modern sense, since "he never declared sensation to be the source of knowledge; much less did he declare all sensations to be trustworthy". **What is Dewitt refering to when he says "empiricism in the modern sense"?**
- P8 Epicurus used mostly ("his chief reliance") deductive reasoning.
- P8 "The mistake is to look upon Epicurus as an effeminate and a mora invalid". **My doubt here is not specifically about the philosophy but rather how in this instance and in some other texts stoic texts I've read they refer to femininity (which I take as having a behavior that likens that of women) as a very bad thing. This hasn't aged well. My surprise here is that the one who uses this adjective is Dewitt, as he's not quoting a text of that old period. This doesn't seem to me to be very Epicurean, from what I've understood so far of Epicurus.**
- P8 "He was an altruistic hedonist".
- P8 Epicureanism "shunted the emphasis from the political to the social virtues and offered what may be called a religion of humanity". "The mistake is to" ... "think of its founder [of the philosophy, Epicurus] as an enemy of religion". **Again, religion (for me) is the epitome of dogma; how important is religion to Epicurean philosophy? Does religion here have a different connotation than what it usually means? How is somebody going to be able to learn something different (and change his/her mind to something better) if we argue in favor of dogma and religion?**
- P8 Epicureanism has survived in literature and ethics "by amalgamation with Stoicism, chiefly through Seneca and Marcus Aurelius".
- P9 Some influences of Epicurus were Isocrates, Euclic, Diogenes, Aristotle, Aristobulus, Nearchus, the first Ptolemy.
- P9 From Euclid he got a simple style for communicating and deductive procedures.

- P9 From the Cynics, the quest of honesty, but repudiating "their insolence and vulgarity", emphasizing that "honesty be joined with courtesy and decorum".
- P10 From Aristotle, "the revelation of a new order of Nature", and from here "Epicurs rejected the hypostatized Reason of Plato as the norm of truth and looked instead to Nature as furnishing the norm".
- P10 The "chief negative influences were Platonism and oratory" which were both obsessed with politics, rendering "happines of the individual [as] inseparable from his life as a citizen".
- P11 War ensued with the program of Platonic education, because Platonism "stood for the tight combination of ethics with politics which disqualified philosophy for universal acceptance".
- P11 Stoicism is written off as a possible influence in the life of Epicurus.
- P12 Sophocles may have inspired the principle that pain is evil, and Homer was cited as "authority for the doctrine that pleasure is the telos or goal of living".
- P12 Epicurus "declared dialectic a superfluity". " He rejected geometry as having no bearing upon problems of conduct".
- P12 Epicurus's "classification of the desires is developed from a Platonic hint, and he begins to erect his structure of hedonism from the point where this topic was left by Plato", and "more than half of his forty Authorized Doctrines are direct contradictions of Platonic teachings".
- P13 With Aristotle he had in common a "direct analytical approach to problems as opposed to the circuitous analogical approach adopted by Plato", but Epicurus was also pragmatic at the same time.
- P13 "There is no better preparation for the ethics of Epicurus than a perusal of that that treatise (Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle), and especially of the sections on Friendship, the Magnanimous Man, and Happiness".
- P13 "Many anticipations of his teachings may there be identified: for example, the possibility of man's attainment to a life that in respect of quality may be called immortal or divine". **Did Epicurus actually used inmortality or divinity as qualities to describe a good life? Isn't this a bit contradictory?**
- P13 "Aristotle's study of the embrio seems to have given rise to the doctrine of innate ideas or Anticipations...". **It just seems kind of incongruent that they would derive conclusions from things they were unable to sense in any way, and criticize others for doing the same in a different domain. But here I have doubts I may be misunderstanding something.**
- P13 Epicurus based his theroy of pleasure and definition of justice in animal behavior.
- P13 He studied with Nausiphanes who gave him a suggestion about a canon of truth. **What suggestion would this be?**
- P14 Many explanations as to why Epicurus didn't show gratitude to his teachers.
- P15 "he arrogated the title of Sage or Wise Man" and he was capable "of claiming perfection of knowledge, because *he had approximated to the life of the gods*". **What do**

you think this means?

- P15 He held a presumptuous attitude "virtually imperative for him as thte founder and head of a sect". **The term sect to me holds a negative connotation; would you agree to call Epicurus's movement a sect?**
- P15 He revived "the tratidion of Ionian science, which had been interrupted by Socrates and Plato".
- P15 Two separate trends can be identified in Greek philosophy: One observational and speculative, and the other mathematical and contemplative.
- P16 Geometry inspired a movement that was romantic; Plato seemed to see in it "absolute reason contemplating absolute truth, perfect precission of concept joined with finality of demonstration". "He began to transfer the precise concepts of geometry to ethics and politics". "Especially enticing was the concept which we know as definition. This was a creation of the geometricians; they created it by defining straight lines, equilateral triangles, and other regular figures. If these can be defined, Plato tacitly reasoned, why not also justice, piety, temperance, and other virtues? This is reasoning by analogy, one of the trickiest of logical procedures. It only holds good only between sets of true similars. Virtues and triangles are not true similars. It does not follow, therefore, because equilatereal traingles can be precisely defined, that justice can be defined in the same way." **This makes sense, at least at a glance. But perhaps it could be argued that it still lacks more arguments for proof. I think if this can be further developed by way of examples it could be validated, without the need for mor argumentation. Can you think of any?**
- P17 The abilities of both Socrates and Plato gave fruit to the "dramatization of logic which is called dialectic, best exemplified by the Platonic dialogues".
- P17 "The quest of a definition, of justice, for example, presumes the existence of the thing to be defined". **What would be your answer to the argument that, from this sentence, follows that justice doesn't exist?**
- P17 "Hence arose Plato's theory of ideas. The word idea means shape or form and he thought of abstract notions as having an independent existence just as geometrical figures exist, a false analogy". This was rejected as absurd by Epicurus. **So... geometrical figures are things that exist, that can be abstractly defined, in terms of its relations with physical things. But the ideas of virtues, don't exist in the physical world. Then, a definition of them, eludes us, because we cannot derive it from observation of their existence in the physical world of atoms and void. Or, so we can try to define them, albeit poorly or in a very limited fashion, in abstract terms, when we observe something in the physical world that we would call is a physical manifestation of said idea, but accepting that the definition can only comprise the observed phenomenon, and hence it cannot be absolute or universal and only related to that one observation?**

I'm going ot have to finish this in another post.

Post by “Don” of July 5, 2020 at 9:42 PM

You raise some great points here, Mathitis Kipouros , and I can see some echoes of my reaction to DeWitt. I'll try (and I'm sure others will as well) to respond to some of your questions. First one...

> Quote
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> P4 "The universe consists of atoms and void" so the soul is composed of atoms. **Is somebody willing to ellaborate on this point?**

Everything is atoms and void. **Everything**. Period. The use of the word "soul" is a little misleading here. That word in English implies an immortal aspect of one's identity. The word Epicurus used was ψυχή psyche which could mean what we think of as "soul" but also "the conscious self or personality as centre of emotions, desires, and affections." So,it had a wider connotation. Granted, the Greeks did use this word to mean an immortal entity, but not Epicurus.

In any case, even if it did mean "soul" (as in the innermost core of one's personality and mind and emotions), Epicurus taught that the "soul" was still material. Composed of atoms and void. And when one died, the soul died too, returned to its constituent atoms back to the universe to be reused again. The "soul atoms" may be extremely fine and move quickly (to account for sensation throughout the body), but it was still composed of atoms like everything else.

There is **NO immortal soul** in Epicureanism. After death, there is Nothing to feel, to sense, to experience eternal reward or eternal punishment. That's why "death is nothing to us." We don't experience it.

I hope that helps.

Post by “Don” of July 5, 2020 at 9:55 PM

> Quote
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> P5 "Faith was recognized for the first time as a factor in happiness". **I guess this will be expanded upon later in the book, but... why does faith play such an important role in Epicurean Philosophy? How is this not contradictory to its materialistic ontology and its empiricist epistemology?**

In my opinion, this use of the word "faith" is a relic of Dewitt's Epicurean Christianity habits. I don't like the use of faith here (I went back and looked at Dewitt, too). It's a fine word, but it has far too much religious baggage attached to it.

I think what Dewitt is trying to say is that Epicurus put **trust** (a synonym for faith) in his certainty that knowledge could be obtained. The sentence before the one you quote:

> Quote
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> At the same time the objective of study is stressed, which is ataraxy, the quiet of mind that arises from faith in the certainty of knowledge. Incidentally, faith was recognized for the first time as a factor in happiness.

... Leads me to believe that Dewitt is contrasting Epicurus with the classical Skeptics who didn't believe one could say anything for sure about reality. The Skeptics said one couldn't have "faith" or trust in one's senses or say definitive things about reality. Epicurus trusted in (or "had faith in") his pursuit of knowledge and that he could arrive at a true understanding of reality.

Post by “Cassius” of July 5, 2020 at 9:57 PM

Camotero thanks for your work in making that post! I agree with Don's start but you're asking a classic series of questions that will take time to go through and deal with individually, but that's definitely what we will do!

First, as Don says, your questions are a natural result of the "outline" method that Dewitt is using, on the Epicurean model. You are being given big-picture conclusions early on, and in order to be satisfied with them you are going to need to know the details of the argument, but by knowing the outline at first you are better able to see where it goes. Or at least that's the theory anyway -- I do think it is a good one. In the next post I'll respond to the particular points at least in brief.

Post by “Don” of July 5, 2020 at 10:14 PM

Mathitis Kipouros , I certainly sympathize with your uneasiness about the use of the word "dogma" and its religious baggage. I believe this also goes to (partially, at least) Epicurus's opposition to the Skeptics. In my translation of the characteristics of an Epicurean sage, I

translated the usual translation "a sage will dogmatize..." as...

> Quote
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> (the sage will) Declare their beliefs and not remain in doubt

Similar to my reply in that last post, I think this means the Epicurean puts trust in the picture of reality painted by Epicurus, declares those beliefs trustworthy, and doesn't remain in doubt - going through life in want or need - of an explanation of reality.

At its most basic, dogma just means a settled opinion or someone firmly established. It doesn't *need* to be something taken on blind faith. Epicurus has reasoned out his "dogma" and built it on a firm foundation, that's why we can trust it or, if you will, have "faith" in it.

Post by “Don” of July 5, 2020 at 10:22 PM

> Quote
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> P5 There is a mention about "the thirty-seven books on Physics". **What is this referring to?**

This is an easy one before I head of to bed this evening 🙂

In the 10th book of Diogenes Laertius' Lives, he gives the list of Epicurus's books he's written. In that list (starting in section 27), the first work written by Epicurus is:

> Quote
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> Of Nature, thirty-seven books

The Greek is Περί Φύσεως "Peri Physeōs" "On Nature" and since the second word looks similar to Physics, some translate it that way.

It is theorized that Lucretius based his poem *De Rerum Natura* "*On The Nature of Things*" on the outline of Epicurus's *On Nature/Physics.*

I'm sure others will weigh in on your questions, and I'm looking forward to contributing as well.

Post by “Cassius” of July 5, 2020 at 10:37 PM

> Quote from camotero
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> P4 "The universe consists of atoms and void" so the soul is composed of atoms. Is somebody willing to ellaborate on this point?

I think Don hit that one well. The issue is that everything that exists either does, or does not, have the ability to be "touched" and occupy space, or else is the space that is being occupied. And when we say everything, "everything" includes whatever it is that you'd like to call the soul (if it exists) because if something cannot occupy space then it does not by definition exist. It's important to observe that of course we can't sense things as small as atoms, so this argument is ultimately a logical one, but one that comports with the evidence that we ARE able to detect with our senses. This is the point DeWitt emphasizes when he says that Epicurean philosophy is not strictly "empiricism" in the sense that it demands everything to be directly observable by the senses. Atoms aren't directly observable, and neither did Epicurus argue (like some modern empiricists) that everything must come to us from the five senses.

> Quote from camotero
>
> P5 "Faith was recognized for the first time as a factor in happiness". I guess this will be expanded upon later in the book, but... why does faith play such an important role in Epicurean Philosophy? How is this not contradictory to its materialistic ontology and its empiricist epistemology?

You will see that this kind of "faith" is probably better thought of as "confidence in our conclusions about things which cannot be seen, which we have because the things which CAN be "seen" support our observations, as does our system of thought. We have "faith" that atoms exist even though we have never and will never see them ourselves. As in many cases the subtlety of the word definition is very important and Epicurus uses words sometimes in a different sense than we use them today, plus of course there are issues of translation.

> Quote from camotero
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> P5 The nature of gods, which is presumed to be the topic of the book missing from Lucretiu's poem. What is Epicurean Philosophy's stance on this topic since there is no extant text about it? Or there is?

That's a long and detailed subject which DeWitt will answer best for you. I've done a FAQ here but I suggest you suspend judgment til you read DeWitt's full explanation. https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/index.php?faq/#entry-18

> Quote from camotero

> P5 The synoptic view of Epicurus and his philosophy are "presented in the form of dogmatic general statements". From my first reading, I remembered some reference about the value of dogma, but I don't know if its this one or another one later on. Dogma doesn't strike me as a constructive thing, let alone in philosophy; is this something that is just asked of the reader at the beginning because of the synoptic view, or is dogma a particularly important part of the philosophy?

By "dogma" here is meant simply that SOME things are knowable in a way that we can be confident or essentially certain about them, following the principles of Epicurean epistemology. Epicurus was not a radical skeptic and did not join them in holding that nothing is knowable. Of course the issue of what IS knowable is tricky, but since he claimed that some things are knowable that makes him a "dogmatist" in the strict definition of the term. I predict that ultimately when you read into this you will not have an issue with it, but you do need to be aware that people who ARE radical skeptics, and who hold that "nothing" should be considered to be "known" are definitely going to find themselves at odds with Epicurus.

> Quote from camotero
>
> P7 "He was the first to promulgate a dogmatic philosophy" ... "The distinction of being a dogmatist was naturally not denied him, because it was deemed a demerit, the renunciation of inquiry". This is the part I was referring to (in my comment lines above); I too think that dogmatism is a reunciation of inquiry; how is this not in agreement with Dewitt? Am I understanding something wrong? Why does he propose dogmatism as an argument in favor of the philosophy.

The answer to this is the same as what I typed above. This is another of many important examples where if you project modern terminology on Epicurus you will be very dangerously misled. DeWitt is introducing the topic and will answer it in detail later.

> Quote from camotero
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> P7 Epicurs epistemology is not empiricist in the modern sense, since "he never declared sensation to be the source of knowledge; much less did he declare all sensations to be trustworthy". What is Dewitt refering to when he says "empiricism in the modern sense"?

He is referring (accurately or not, I don't know) to the contention of some philosophers (apparently) that nothing exists which does not enter the human mind through the five senses. DeWitt says that Locke and others took this view, and it is sort of related to the "blank slate" argument too. DeWitt contends (and I think correctly) that Epicurus was a very strong proponent of the use of "reason" to reach conclusions that cannot strictly be validated by direct observation through the senses. (You'll never see an atom, but you should be confident that they exist.)

> Quote from camotero
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> P8 "The mistake is to look upon Epicurus as an effeminate and a mora invalid". My doubt here is not specifically about the philosophy but rather how in this instance and in some other texts stoic texts I've read they refer to femininity (which I take as having a behavior that likens that of women) as a very bad thing. This hasn't aged well. My surprise here is that the one who uses this adjective is Dewitt, as he's not quoting a text of that old period. This doesn't seem to me to be very Epicurean, from what I've understood so far of Epicurus.

There Camotero I think you are again following modern terminology, and this is an area almost like the use of masculine pronouns to denote both male and female. It is no longer considered good form to use the word "effeminate" and you are right that it originated as a slam on women that we would not use today, but the meaning of it was of course things like "cowardly" or "overly emotional" or "unreasonable" so the intent of the word is clear. DeWitt was writing in the early part of the 20th Century so that's a word choice that would not be used today, but it's something we have to deal with. Maybe an even more direct and emotional example would be that Epicurus held slaves, and yet we don't (or I don't anyway) reject his philosophy due to that fact. We can get a lot out of DeWitt without accepting Dewitt's personal choices.

> Quote from camotero
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> P8 Epicureanism "shunted the emphasis from the political to the social virtues and offered what may be called a religion of humanity". "The mistake is to" ... "think of its founder [of the philosophy, Epicurus] as an enemy of religion". Again, religion (for me) is the epitome of dogma; how important is religion to Epicurean philosophy? Does religion here have a different connotation than what it usually means? How is somebody going to be able to learn something different (and change his/her mind to something better) if we argue in favor of dogma and religion?

OK this relates again to the nature of the gods argument. I urge you just to hold that off and suspend judgment until you see how strongly Epicurus held that any "god" is first and foremost NOT supernatural, and that he had a very specific definition of them that I doubt very much you will ultimately have much objection to.

> Quote from camotero
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> P13 "Many anticipations of his teachings may there be identified: for example, the possibility of man's attainment to a life that in respect of quality may be called immortal or divine". Did Epicurus actually used inmortality or divinity as qualities to describe a good life? Isn't this a bit contradictory?

OK this is another question that will be answered as you read the chapter on the true piety. For now I would say that for Epicurus these words are what we would call poetic analogies that are

not meant to imply supernatural beings or attributes. However I should note that your reaction to them is part of the reason that Epicurus was concerned about promoting a "true" and alternate version of religion. We do have in our minds ideas that we attach to words like "divinity" and Epicurus wanted those concepts to be useful to us, and not harmful. it is useful to have descriptions such as "worthy of the gods" to describe things of great beauty and pleasure and even awe to us, without polluting those feelings with supernatural nonsense.

> Quote from camotero
>
> P13 "Aristotle's study of the embrio seems to have given rise to the doctrine of innate ideas or Anticipations...". It just seems kind of incongruent that they would derive conclusions from things they were unable to sense in any way, and criticize others for doing the same in a different domain. But here I have doubts I may be misunderstanding something.

The issue of anticipations is very complex and you will need to read the detail. But for now this is an example of how Epicurus was not a strict empiricist and did not insist that the five senses are the source of all knowledge. Whether you want to consider this as something like animal instinct (birds migrating) or something else, Epicurus held that living beings are not totally "blank slates" at birth.

> Quote from camotero
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> P15 "he arrogated the title of Sage or Wise Man" and he was capable "of claiming perfection of knowledge, because he had approximated to the life of the gods". What do you think this means?

I think this is Dewitt being a little too poetic. There is a lot of debate about to what extent Epicureanism was a "cult of personality." Epicurus' critics try to make it look like Epicurean philosophy was a "cult." A much more reasonable interpretation is that Epicurus was in fact revered as a father figure, to whom personal appreciation was owed for his accomplishments, and that Epicurus considered that it is good for us to have such "role models" as practical influences in life.

> Quote from camotero
>
> P15 He held a presumptuous attitude "virtually imperative for him as thte founder and head of a sect". The term sect to me holds a negative connotation; would you agree to call Epicurus's movement a sect?

Again this is Dewittian language that I would prefer he not have used. DeWitt dearly loves to compare the Epicurean movement to early Christianity, and indeed there is probably "some" justification for that. These kind of references are useful if your audience is going to be composed primarily of Christians, as DeWitt probably expected his book to be. These kind of

references are not so useful or helpful to "us" in 2020.

> Quote from camotero
>
> P16 Geometry inspired a movement that was romantic; Plato seemed to see in it "absolute reason contemplating absolute truth, perfect precission of concept joined with finality of demonstration". "He began to transfer the precise concepts of geometry to ethics and politics". "Especially enticing was the concept which we know as definition. This was a creation of the geometricians; they created it by defining straight lines, equilateral triangles, and other regular figures. If these can be defined, Plato tacitly reasoned, why not also justice, piety, temperance, and other virtues? This is reasoning by analogy, one of the trickiest of logical procedures. It only holds good only between sets of true similars. Virtues and triangles are not true similars. It does not follow, therefore, because equilatereal traingles can be precisely defined, that justice can be defined in the same way." This makes sense, at least at a glance. But perhaps it could be argued that it still lacks more arguments for proof. I think if this can be further developed by way of examples it could be validated, without the need for mor argumentation. Can you think of any?

I am not sure you bolded anything here but I do have a comment, because this is a subject still going around in my mind and I see it implicit in lots of our conversations. Epicurus was promoting a "philosophy" which includes epistemology and a LOT of his writing is direct sparring with the arguments of Plato/Aristotle and as continued with the Stoics. Epicurus was not anti-science at all, but I think he accepted also that all of us face limits on the direct knowledge that is open to us, and so each of us also have to take a position on questions where we don't have, and never will have, all the direct evidence we would like to have. What do we do in those cases? We develop rules for evaluating the evidence that IS available to us, and we do our best to then apply those rules and have "confidence" in the result, knowing that that's the best we can do.

> Quote from camotero
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> P17 "The quest of a definition, of justice, for example, presumes the existence of the thing to be defined". What would be your answer to the argument that, from this sentence, follows that justice doesn't exist?

Well that is in fact Epicurus' conclusion, in my view. Justice does NOT have a separate existence outside our own personal perspectives of it. Very deep subject but you'll see how it is compelled by the rest of the philosophy.

> Quote from camotero
>
> P17 "Hence arose Plato's theory of ideas. The word idea means shape or form and he thought of abstract notions as having an independent existence just as geometrical

> figures exist, a false analogy". This was rejected as absurd by Epicurus. So... geometrical figures are things that exist, that can be abstractly defined, in terms of its relations with physical things. But the ideas of virtues, don't exist in the physical world. Then, a definition of them, eludes us, because we cannot derive it from observation of their existence in the physical world of atoms and void. Or, so we can try to define them, albeit poorly or in a very limited fashion, in abstract terms, when we observe something in the physical world that we would call is a physical manifestation of said idea, but accepting that the definition can only comprise the observed phenomenon, and hence it cannot be absolute or universal and only related to that one observation?

I am not sure I grasp your question exactly but yes the point is that absolute ideal forms do not exist. PARTICULAR things which we for example label "square" do exist, but the "concept" of a square is an assertion of the human mind, something that we define, not something that Nature itself has established. Virtue is an extreme example of that because at least squares have a relatively simple definition, while "courage" i or "honor" or "wisdom" are very difficult to define and impossible to evaluate outside a particular fact pattern.

That's my first attempt to get started with your questions. Is see in retrospect that I am using DeWitt's / Epicurus' own pattern, I am hitting the high points and leaving the rest to be filled in later, and to the extent you're interested in pursuing particular ones in detail.