

Episode One Hundred Forty Two - Diogenes of Oinoanda (Part 2) "Reality"

Post by "Cassius" of September 28, 2022 at 5:41 AM

Welcome to Episode One Hundred Forty-Two of Lucretius Today.

This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the only complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

I am your host Cassius, and together with our panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the ancient Epicurean texts, and we'll discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where you will find a discussion thread for each of our podcast episodes and many other topics.

Today we continue with our reading from the Inscription as [translated by Martin Ferguson Smith](#), and this week we do us on issues regarding the nature of reality.

Fr. 5

[Others do not] explicitly [stigmatise] natural science as unnecessary, being ashamed to acknowledge [this], but use another means of discarding it. For, when they assert that things are inapprehensible, what else are they saying than that there is no need for us to pursue natural science? After all, who will choose to seek what he can never find?

Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.

Fr. 6

[As for the first bodies, also] called elements, which on the one hand have subsisted from the beginning [and] are indestructible, and [on the other hand] generate things, we shall explain what [they are] after we have demolished the theories of others.

Well, Heraclitus of Ephesus identified fire as elemental, Thales of Miletus water, Diogenes of Apollonia and Anaximenes air, Empedocles of Acragas fire and air and water and earth, Anaxagoras of Clazomenae the homoeomeries of each thing, and the Stoics matter and God. As for Democritus of Abdera, he did well to identify atoms as elemental, but since his conception of them was in some respects mistaken, he will be considered in the exposition of our theories.

Now we shall bring charges against the said men, not out of contentiousness towards them, but because we wish the truth to be safeguarded; and we shall deal with Heraclitus first, since he has been placed first on our list.

You are mistaken, Heraclitus, in saying that fire is elemental, for neither is it indestructible, since we observe it being destroyed, nor can it generate things...

Fr. 7

Even Democritus erred in a manner unworthy of himself when he said that atoms alone among existing things have true reality, while everything else exists by convention. For, according to your account, Democritus, it will be impossible for us even to live, let alone discover the truth, since we shall be unable to protect ourselves from either fire or slaughter or [any other force].

Episode 142 - The Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda (Part Two) "Reality" is now available!

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/51477019>

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2022 at 9:11 AM

Joshua ended up being sick and missed this episode, but we were able to get something recorded and i will have that up asap.

In the meantime one of the many ways we missed Joshua was in discussing:

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Fr. 7

Even Democritus erred in a manner unworthy of himself when he said that atoms alone

among existing things have true reality, while everything else exists by convention. For, according to your account, Democritus, it will be impossible for us even to live, let alone discover the truth, since we shall be unable to protect ourselves from either fire or slaughter or [any other force].

I fumbled around without coming up with the exact quote from Democritus, which Joshua always remembers, to the effect that nothing by atoms and void are "truly real." Since this reference is probably key to understanding that passage, Joshua when you get a chance could you cite for us the exact quote that you've referenced many times? If we don't have it already we need a separate subforum on Democritus here.

This is an issue of recurring interest so i set up a separate thread here: [The "Nothing is truly real but atoms and void" statement](#)

Post by “Joshua” of October 3, 2022 at 9:39 AM

Quote

By convention sweet and by convention bitter, by convention hot, by convention cold, by convention color; but in reality atoms and void.

I'm sorry I couldn't make it!

Post by “Joshua” of October 3, 2022 at 9:40 AM

In Greek:

Quote

νόμωι (γάρ φησι) γλυκὸ καὶ νόμωι πικρόν, νόμωι θερμόν, νόμωι ψυχρόν, νόμωι χροίη, ἔτεήι δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν (Tetralogies of Thrasyllus, 9; Sext. Emp. adv. math. VII 135)

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2022 at 12:48 PM

Argh I knew I needed to find it but I did not remember that the quote actually has the word "convention" in it, just like Diogenes of Oinoanda was criticizing. I know I made the point generally but that's what we miss in not having you there to illustrate. We may well want to return to the point in the podcast next week given its significance in (1) distinguishing Epicurus from Democritus, and (2) combatting the "nihilism" that follows from an over literal application of thinking that nothing is literally "real" in our perceptions of the world.

Post by “Don” of October 3, 2022 at 2:29 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

In Greek:

Quote

νόμωι (γάρ φησι) γλυκὸ καὶ νόμωι πικρὸν, νόμωι θερμόν, νόμωι ψυχρόν, νόμωι χροίη, ἔτεῆι δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν (Tetralogies of Thrasyllus, 9; Sext. Emp. adv. math. VII 135)

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...entry=no%2Fmos2>

νόμωι "by custom, conventionally" is an interesting word to use, and I'm not sure I completely disagree with Democritus. We are all - everything - is literally temporary arrangements of atoms and void. That doesn't mean we're not "real". If one drills down far enough, you end up with atoms and void. But through our arrangements of atoms, we interact with the world, each other. Epicurus himself or Lucretius said atoms don't have color or smell or taste, but arrangements give rise to color and smell and taste.

Edit: I suppose I should also include ἔτεῆι δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν. That word does mean "in reality." LSJ uses Democritus's quote in its definition.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἔτεός](#)

Post by “Cassius” of October 5, 2022 at 10:39 AM

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Post by “Root304” of October 10, 2022 at 3:29 PM

The subject of "what is reality" to Epicureans would be a great topic to return to. I feel I often make this Democritean turn of thinking that matter/energy and void are what exist; but our sensation/experiences of, sociability with, and our reasoning about the emergent properties of biological entities and otherwise, generate convention, or existing in our minds as transmittable ideas. And we ought to be skeptical about ideas far more than about our sensations. Always a joy listening to this podcast!