

"Epicurean Philosophy: An Introduction from the 'Garden of Athens'" edited by Christos Yapijakis

Post by "Godfrey" of January 9, 2023 at 1:37 AM

This post is just an introductory post for this introductory book. I'm only part way through the book, but there are two topics in particular which look to be fruitful for discussion here.

But first, a quick overview. As the title indicates, this is intended to be an introductory book. In keeping with that, it's a fairly quick read. The [Principal Doctrines](#), the Vatican Sayings, some of Diogenes Laertius, and the three letters are included (these are not new translations, for those interested). The chapters are essays written by members of the Garden of Athens and originally published separately over the last decade or so.

The essays provide an introductory outline of the philosophy, and include a few that focus on the Canon and epistemology (or gnoseology, the term used in the book).

The topics of particular interest here are:

1) The principles of atomic physics. Not 12, not 10, but 18 principles are listed. I didn't notice how this number was derived. Given some of the recent discussion on the forum, however, this might be fuel for a post or two 😊

2) Even more interesting, to me, is the discussion of epistemology. A case is made for the Canon having four parts, not three. Here, we subscribe to the idea of the three part Canon but are aware of the argument for a fourth part; in the book they make the argument for the fourth, which is "the imaginary impositions of the mind." Definitely a topic worth discussing!

There's more, but this is as far as I've read so far. I'll want to go back and review some of the book before I post in detail: consider this a teaser for the book 😊 They have some different takes on the philosophy than we do, and understanding their thinking on various issues will, I think, be very useful for us, whether we eventually agree or not.

I'd love to hear other people's thoughts on the book. It's reasonably priced, and the Kindle version is available for free on Amazon Unlimited. (For the budget conscious: a couple of weeks ago I got a two month AU subscription for 99 cents a month, but I'm not sure if Amazon is still offering that.)

Post by "Cassius" of January 9, 2023 at 3:46 AM

Thank you Godfrey! Yes it would be very helpful to take note of differences of interpretation as that will help clarify things whether we agree or disagree.

The "three" vs. "four" legs of the canon is a great example of that. Diogenes Laertius himself points out that later Epicureans disagreed with Epicurus on this and added the fourth. DeWitt sides strongly with Epicurus on this, but no matter which side we choose it helps to understand why there was disagreement. In discussions from some years ago I recall reading that the current Greek Epicureans take the "four" position, but I don't recall seeing a good clear written explanation as to why they do so.

This is similar to issues pointed out by Torquatus where he himself appears to say that he is deviating from Epicurus. If we can't explain the disagreement then there is no way we can intelligently decide which we think is correct.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 9, 2023 at 10:02 AM

[Godfrey](#) thank you for identifying this! Amazon is sending me this book tomorrow and I happen to be on a bit of a ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΜΑΤΑ kick so I am really interested to see other people's interpretations of the "elementary principles." I've been breaking-down the *Epistles* and am including this brief sketch for myself for future references when I have a chance to read the book and explore how they constructed their list of elementary principles.

ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΜΑΤΑ — STOIKHEIOMATA — ELEMENTARIES

στοιχειώματα, “*elementary principles*” (EH 36.8-9); **στοιχείωσις**, “*first principles*” (EH 37.5)

Αἱ δώδεκα στοιχειώσεις — “*The Twelve Elements*”

Epicurus' ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΜΑΤΑ (*stoikheiómata*, or “*elementary outline*”, per R. D. Hicks) conceptually anticipated the **Cosmological Principle**, the **Law of Conservation of Mass**, the **Law of Definite Proportions**, the **First Law of Thermodynamics**, **Molecular Vibration**, **Brownian Motion**, the **Special Theory of Relativity**, and **Quantum Field Theory**.

Epicurus' **Synopsis On Physics** (to [Herodotus](#)):

“*Indeed it is necessary to go back on the main principles, and constantly to fix in one's memory enough to give one the most essential comprehension of the truth.*” (EH 36.1-2)

“*I who urge upon others the constant occupation in the investigation of nature, and find my own peace chiefly in a life so occupied, have composed for you another **epitome** on these*

lines, summing up the first principles of the whole doctrine." (EH. 37.4-5)

- - **1. Things don't just appear.** (EH 38.10-11; DRN I 150-174)
 - **2. Things don't just disappear.** (EH 39.1-2; DRN I 215-224, 238)
 - **3. It's always been this way.** (EH 39.2-6, 44.6-7; DRN II 297-308, V 362-364)
 - **4. It's all just things in space.** (EH 39.7-40.6; DRN I 419-439, V 352-362)
 - **5. All things are made of particles.** (EH 40.7-41.5; DRN I 483-503)
 - **6. Everything extends infinitely.** (EH 41.6-10; DRN I 959-984)
 - **7. Particles and space are unlimited.** (EH 42.1-42.5; DRN I 985-1021, II 339-40, 523-531)
 - **8. Particles have nearly unlimited shapes.** (EH 42.6-42.12; DRN II 341-381)
 - **9. Particles move constantly, even when entangled.** (EH 43.1-44.7; DRN II 309-333)

"These brief sayings, if all these point are borne in mind afford a sufficient outline for our understanding of the nature of existing things." (EH 45.1)

- - **There are an infinite number of worlds.** (EH 45.3-9)
 - **Everything radiates tiny, sensible particles.** (EH 46.1-47.2)
 - **Particles are unsurpassably fine and fast.** (EH 47.1-4, 61.11-13)
 - **Particles flow at a continuous, instantaneous rate.** (EH 48.1-6)
 - **Particles can mix in the air and form illusions.** (EH 48.6-11)
 - **We see when particles emanate from things and hit our eyes.** (EH 49.1-50.8)
 - **"Truth" is a true opinion about sensations.** (EH 50.8-52.4)
 - **We hear when currents of particles stretch into our ears.** (EH 52.5-53.8)
 - **We smell when particles waft from things into our noses.** (EH 53.9-53.13)
 - **Particles have three qualities: shape, size, and weight.** (EH 54.1-8; DRN II 748-752)
 - **Particles have a maximum size.** (EH 55.1-8)
 - **Particles have a minimum size.** (EH 56.5-59.12)
 - **All positions are relative.** (EH 60.1-12)
 - **Particles move with equal speed when falling through the void.** (EH 61.1-10)
 - **Particles move imperceptibly, incomprehensibly fast.** (EH 46b.1-3)
 - **Particles move even when entangled in compounds.** (EH 62.1-47b.8)

"Next, referring always to the sensations and the feelings <for in this way you will obtain the most trustworthy ground of belief>, you must consider that..." (EH 63.1-2)

- - **The soul is made of particles.** (EH 63.2-11)
 - **The soul gives the body sensation.** (EH 63.11-64.1)
 - **The soul lives within the body.** (EH 64.1-10)
 - **The body cannot perceive without a soul.** (EH 65.1-8)

- **The soul cannot perceive outside a body.** (EH 65.8-67.9)
- **Only void is incorporeal.** (EH 67.1-68.1)

“Now if one refers all these reasonings and remembers when was said at the outset, he will see that they are sufficiently embraced in these general formulae to enable him to work out with certainty on this basis the details of the system as well.” (EH 68.1-5)

- ◦ **Properties do not exist without bodies** (EH 68.6-69.1)
- **Properties are not incorporeal.** (EH 69.1-69.3)
- **Properties define bodies.** (EH 69.3-69.11)
- **Properties of bodies can change.** (EH 70.1-71.11)
- **Time is neither a body nor a body’s property.** (EH 72.1-73.6)
- ◦ **Worlds evolved from clumps of particles.** (EH 73.7-73.12)
- **Worlds are similar yet diverse in nature.** (EH 74.1-2)
- **Worlds host other kinds of plants and animals.** (EH 74.2-6)
- **Civilizations evolve over time.** (EH 75.1-2)
- **Languages evolve over time.** (EH 75.6-76.7)
- ◦ **“The All” is NOT governed by a divine being.** (EH 76.8-77.5)
- **Celestial objects are just collections of fire.** (EH 77.5-12)
- **Happiness requires a clear understanding of nature.** (EH 78.1-79.1)
- **Obsessing over mythic questions does not lead to happiness.** (EH 79.1-80.3)
- **Conclusions should cohere with evidence.** (EH 80.1-80.11)
- **Confidence is knowing that you are not being dogged by a demon.** (EH 81.1-82.3)
- **Trust your feelings and sensations; apply standards of judgment.** (EH 82.4-82.10)

“Here [...] is my treatise on the chief points concerning the nature of the general principles, abridged so that my account would be easy to grasp with accuracy.” (EH 82.11-83.2)

A number of those can be derived (the nature of the soul, the orientation and organization of the world, human evolution and civilization, sensible properties, etc.) from the "first principles".

I am personally curious how many of EH 45-62 get included in their list.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 9, 2023 at 10:06 AM

... and I'm willing to bet a discussion on *epibolai tês dianoias* is to shortly follow. 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 9, 2023 at 10:26 AM

[Quote from Nate](#)

Everything radiates tiny, sensible particles. (EH 46.1-47.2)

Nate - In regard to this one, I think it would be useful if we could mention -- when the occasion arises in these discussions you are referring to -- the distinction or relationship between (1) the process of seeing or hearing or smelling due to the movement of particles, and (2) the phenomena described as "images."

It seems pretty clear when you drill down that the processing of "images" is not the same thing as "seeing" (or hearing or smelling) but it is very easy to lump all these things together and talk about them as if they are the same. For example the phenomena you are referencing in this item is not necessarily describing sight, yet many readers are likely going to presume that that is what it refers to (especially when we call them "sensible").

Another reason for my comment is that I think this probably plays into the controversy of the "present impressions of the mind." It would therefore be helpful for a number of reasons if we could work to make clear the distinction between "images" and the phenomena we include under the 5 senses (if in fact there is a difference, which I am presuming there is.)

Post by “Don” of January 9, 2023 at 12:23 PM

fwiw ...

Post

[PD24 - Commentary and Translation of PD 24](#)

Principal Doctrine 24 (PD 24) is one of the more convoluted doctrines with multiple phrases and conjunctions. I would like to provide some commentary and break the doctrine down into manageable words and phrases for everyone to get a more coherent understanding of what Epicurus was communicating. You may also want to take a look at [this doctrine's page on the Epicurus Wiki](#):

First the original text:

[...]

Now, let's break it down before we put it all back together. I'll provide a (mostly) literal...



Don

September 2, 2020 at 11:56 PM

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2023 at 12:56 AM

Godfrey I just finished editing and posting this week's Lucretius Today podcast, and I realized that this issue of the alleged "fourth leg" of the canon comes up at the 56 minute mark of the episode. We didn't get into it in great detail, since I haven't been able to read the new book yet, but thought I would mention this here for future reference because this issue is part of what DeWitt addressed in discussing "The Canon, Reason, And Nature" in his chapter seven.

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2023 at 6:52 AM

Just to set the stage on the "three legs of the canon vs. four" issue, the following is from the chapter of the book entitled "Epicurean Gnoseology":

The four criteria of truth include senses, concepts (προλήψεις, "preconceptions"), emotions (πάθη, "passions") of pleasure and pain and the imaginary imposition of the mind (φανταστική έπιβολή τής διανοίας):

...

Preconceptions are concepts stored in the mind and are derived from the senses. These concepts are based on repetitive sensory experiences. They do not need verbal proof since they are evident by observation to all ("universal understanding"), constituting a criterion of correct belief. For example, it is common to all people who have seen a rose, the "clear preconception of a rose", that is, the explicit concept based on observation of this material object. Through preconceptions, the chaotic information of the sensory world begins to assemble into a coherent, structured, and stable entity leading to the emergence of language and consciousness.

...

Imaginary impositions of the mind are representations that the mind captures when it focuses its attention on something. In its singular form, the term has been interpreted as "insightful conception of the mind", "immediate perception of the mind", and "focus of the mind on an impression", but perhaps the best conceptual approach to the term is 'focusing on a cognitive image'. According to Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus, in his book "Kanon", describes the three criteria of truth, senses, preconceptions and passions. At the same time, the imaginary imposition of mind was added as a criterion of truth by the later Epicureans (D.L. X31). However, Epicurus, in his [Principal Doctrines](#) (XXIV), mentions: "If you reject absolutely any single sensation without stopping to discriminate with respect to that which awaits confirmation between matter of opinion and that which is already present, whether in sensation or in feelings or in any immediate perception of the mind,

[The discussion of this latter paragraph is taken further, basically in the direction of interpreting impacts of "images" on the mind as constituting a fourth leg. As far as I can tell so far the book does not attempt to take a position on why Epicurus himself did not consider this to be a full leg of the canon, or on why later Epicureans thought he was wrong in failing to do so.]

Post by "Don" of January 10, 2023 at 7:22 AM

The "fourth leg" seems to me that it's simply the way the mind can be used as a "sense organ." I grasp smells with my nose, sights with my eyes, sounds with my ears, physical senses with me sense of touch, tastes with my tongue (and nose!), and ideas with my mind. I can't "see" language, as a concept, but I can grasp it with my mind.

That said, I could also see this "Fourth leg" as just a synonym for prolepsis or a "kind" off prolepsis. It seems to me that the 4 instead of 3 is maybe splitting hairs unnecessarily.

I found this from one of my posts from similar discussions last year looking at a Sedley paper:

Quote from Sedley

According to Diogenes Laertius (X 31), the Canon gave the three criteria as being sensations, *προληψεις*, and feelings. Cicero's translation of this phrase shows that there is no significance; except perhaps a grammatical one, in Diogenes' omission of the article before *προληψεις*. I mention this because Furley and Rist have deduced from it that *προληψεις* were lumped together with sensations as constituting a single category. Its inclusion of *προληψεις* as truth-criteria dates the Canon at any rate later than the Letter to Herodotus, according to the principle established above. It may well also be significant that the metaphor of *κωνων*, meaning a truth-criterion, does not occur in the

fragments of On Nature Books I-XV, or in the Letter to Herodotus, but is found frequently in the writings which we have already established to belong after 300 B.C.71

This should help dispel the mystification created by Diogenes Laertius' observation that the Epicureans add φανταστικαι επιβολαι της διάνοιας as truth-criteria, which has appeared to many to conflict with Epicurus' own acceptance of these 'image-making mental acts of concentration ' as virtual truth-criteria in the Letter to Herodotus 79 and in KD XXIV. If we assign an early date not only to the Letter to Herodotus but also to KD XXIV, the most satisfactory solution will be that when he came to develop the notion of προληψεις in the following years he subsumed under it certain truth-criteria to which he had previously granted an independent validity. We have already observed that the 'fundamental meaning of a word ' became an element in the broader concept of προληψεις ; and the same goes also for the φανταστικαι επιβολαι της διάνοιας , without which we could not visualise things at will, and consequently could have no generalised conceptions at all. Thus when he came to write the Canon he had downgraded φανταστικαι επιβολαι της διάνοιας in favour of προληψεις. And if later Epicureans chose to upgrade them once more to the status of criteria, they had good authority in their master's early works for so doing. (p.16)

Sedley's paper is available on Academia.edu:
<https://www.academia.edu/resource/work/4310042>

Post by “Godfrey” of January 10, 2023 at 3:17 PM

Here are a couple of other papers that have been in my "to read" list for way too long....

[EpicurusOnImpressionsOfTheMind_DeWitt_14pp.pdf](#)

[EpicurusOnTruthAndFalsehood_Bown_41pp.pdf](#)

Post by “Cassius” of January 10, 2023 at 3:41 PM

Also from the article Don cited, it is interesting to see Sedley disagree so strongly with Bailey's interpretations. This kind of disagreement leads me to conclude that while I am not ready to die on the hill of whether there were only three or actually four criterion of truth, the real issue is

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2823-epicurean-philosophy-an-introduction-from-the-garden-of-athens-edited-by-christo/>

the deeper question of making sure that the criterion come to us "naturally" and "without opinion" and can therefore serve as data which Nature programs us to accept as a given. That's the problem with most versions I see that attempt to describe a "fourth" leg. Like Don is saying, suggestions as to a fourth seem to be describing a process of evaluation, not a mechanism for receiving raw unfiltered data.

To me the danger zone is anytime you cross that line into thinking that something you have developed in your own mind, after evaluation, has to be taken with the kind of acceptance you grant to what you see or hear or touch. I've always read Bailey as indicating that he thinks that conceptions which we develop in our minds can serve as a criterion of truth, and in fairness to him Diogenes Laertius can be read that way.

But I think it's beyond dispute that Epicurus was looking to develop a theory of the tools which Nature gave to us by which to evaluate our conclusions. If so, questions like whether "images" fit within the canon, and whether the canon has three or four or fourteen legs, are not nearly as important as avoiding considering our own thoughts as criteria of truth. But Nature does not give us full-blown conceptions either at birth or at anytime later, at least under any interpretation of Epicurus that I can find to be reasonable.

Considering our own conclusions to be criteria of "truth" seems to me very much like what Plato was doing in suggesting that our minds can make contact with ideal forms. And if you get to that point of agreeing with Plato there, then you get to the point (which we regrettably left out of our most recent podcast) that Plato could hold that you could never really know whether the thing in front of you is a horse, but that you **can** know the ideal form of "horseness."

That Platonic position is at the very least impractical, if not in fact total nonsense.

error.¹³⁹

13 In our text, this ‘empirical’ thought is distinguished from ‘theoretical’ thought about invisible entities (especially in 13 VIII 5-3 inf.); is characterised as thought about particulars by contrast with inductive thought about universals (13 X 9 inf. ff.); and is included in a list of all the chief thought-processes recognised by Epicurus (13 VI 1 inf. ff.). It is antithetical to all abstract forms of thought.¹⁴⁰

by w- ue ro lis id- u- n- ey pi- ng ad ai is ry ts so ης se e- id se
Bailey¹⁴¹ argues that an ἐπιβολή τῆς διανοίας can be used to apprehend not only the objects of perception, but also scientific concepts. This is done, he suggests, by juxtaposing already established facts about atoms and void and then ‘intuitively’ drawing from them an inescapable conclusion. The ἐπιβολή τῆς διανοίας is thus the ultimate criterion in the investigation of the invisible.

If there were any truth in this account, it would be fatal to my explanation of ἐπιβλητικός as ‘empirical’; but fortunately there is none. Bailey bases himself chiefly on the section of the *Letter to Herodotus*¹⁴² in which the motion of atoms in a moving body is discussed. A distinction is made between the ‘smallest period of continuous time’ and ‘periods of time imaginable in thought’,¹⁴³ and we are told that although within the former kind of time-unit the atoms in a moving body move in one direction, within the latter kind they move in all directions, but bounce off each other at such a high rate as to give the visual impression of moving in one only. He adds the explanation: ‘τὸ γὰρ προσδοξαζόμενον περὶ τοῦ ἀοράτου, ὡς ἄρα καὶ οἱ διὰ λόγου θεωρητοὶ χρόνοι τὸ συνεχές τῆς φορᾶς ἔξουσιν, οὐκ ἀληθές ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῶν τοιούτων· ἐπεὶ τό γε θεωρούμενον πᾶν ἢ κατ’ ἐπιβολὴν λαμβανόμενον τῇ διανοίᾳ ἀληθές ἐστὶν’. Bailey’s interpretation of this final phrase (‘ἐπεὶ ...’) is that ‘τὸ... θεωρούμενον’ alludes back to the observed fact that in a continuous period of time the parts of a moving body move in one direction only, and that ‘κατ’ ἐπιβολὴν λαμβανόμενον τῇ διανοίᾳ’ refers to the correct discovery that this same rule does not apply in an atomic period of time. Thus he makes these words explanatory not just of the immediately preceding sentence (‘τὸ γὰρ προσδοξαζόμενον’), but of two separate points in the whole argument that goes before.

e. n, 6. Any reader will, I believe, testify that the text as it stands cannot be understood in this way. The clause beginning ‘ἐπεὶ ...’ can only be explanatory of the clause that immediately precedes it. Furley¹⁴⁴ comes closest to what I believe to be the correct interpretation of the passage. If what Epicurus has stated about

Post by “Godfrey” of January 10, 2023 at 8:33 PM

Am I correct in understanding that "intuitive leaps" are being discussed as a part of this 4th leg? These would be the kind of thing that gives you an "aha!" moment in the shower, for example. If so, the dividing line as to whether or not these are a criterion would be whether or not they are conscious of non-conscious.

Dreams are non-conscious constructs from prior input and are considered "true." Aha moments, I think, are also non-conscious constructs from prior input, so would they, too, be true? Is the answer different depending on whether you consider it from the Epicurean theory of atoms or from modern science?

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2023 at 8:37 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Am I correct in understanding that "intuitive leaps" are being discussed as a part of this 4th leg?

Is that in the Greek book Godfrey? My reading of this 4th leg in the past was that the assertion is much more broad than that, and essentially would include every time a concept is judged to match something being observed - which would be virtually constantly during thought processes. I have not seen it asserted to be something special such as what you might be thinking there.

Post by "Godfrey" of January 10, 2023 at 8:56 PM

Not sure; I was reacting to the above posts. I'm pretty unclear as to the 4th criterion and the *epibolai* so I'm just trying to get my footing at this point. Also, as I recall *epibolai* have something to do with grasping (as in understanding?). Both dreams and intuitive leaps are mechanisms for grasping, to my thinking.

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2023 at 9:07 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Also, as I recall epibolai have something to do with grasping (as in understanding?). Both dreams and intuitive leaps are mechanisms for grasping, to my thinking.

I could easily be wrong, Godfrey, but what I thought I read in the past was that the 4th leg argument asserted that every "flash of recognition" (every time we made a conceptual connection of any kind) was an example of this fourth leg in action. That seems unlikely to me to be what Epicurus intended, but I could be reading it negatively because of my concern that the argument goes too far. A limited faculty like you are talking about would make more sense, but I think what we are dealing with too is an attempt by some to incorporate Diogenes' Laertius' description of how anticipations work (which I think is probably faulty) and to consider as a test of truth every time something matches one of our preconceived concepts - and I don't think that would be consistent with basic canon theory.

Post by "Cassius" of January 10, 2023 at 9:10 PM

In fact Godfrey what you may be describing is probably closer to what DeWitt describes in considering anticipations to be more of an "intuitive" faculty. That would make more sense to me if what is being described is something automatic or involuntary, but I don't get the impression that a generalized fourth leg is meant by its advocates to be that kind of thing. This is definitely a murky subject which is another reason why I resist adding another category which seems so difficult to describe -- anticipations themselves are already difficult enough to describe!

Post by "Godfrey" of January 11, 2023 at 1:28 AM

This thread and the Episode 155 thread are getting intertwined! I just posted there before reading the last couple of posts here. Here's the link to that post, so I don't duplicate it:

Post

[RE: Episode 155 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 11 - The Canon, Reason, and Nature 02](#)

From the Hopkins Press article linked in @Don 's post above: "*In De Anima (Of the Soul) he [Aristotle] argues that, for every sense, there is a sense organ.*" It would seem that Epicurus was referencing this, and thinking of the brain as a sense organ when he wrote about images, dreams and knowledge of the gods. Centaurs and such were also perceived in this way by images getting jumbled in transit, as it were.

Our conception of the brain is far removed from this idea, and this makes it more...



Godfrey

January 11, 2023 at 1:22 AM

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 11, 2023 at 3:49 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

The topics of particular interest here are:

1) The principles of atomic physics. Not 12, not 10, but 18 principles are listed. I didn't notice how this number was derived. Given some of the recent discussion on the forum, however, this might be fuel for a post or two 😊

Starting on Pages 58 and 59 of *An Introduction From the "Garden of Athens"*, a chapter titled "The Epicurean Philosophy: Kanonikon – Physikon – Ethikon" by Giorgos Bakogiannis:

"A. Physikon (Physics)

First, I must stress that this presentation completes my previous short one on atomic physics at the Second Panhellenic Symposium of Philosophy, so I will deal with issues that I did not have the time to present back then.

The principles of atomic physics. Although the atom-based cosmology of Epicurus of Athens corresponds to a certain degree to the physics of Democritus of Abdera, it has its own principles. It is important to emphasize that these principles do not need prerequisites or a priori proposals. On the contrary, they can be subjected to intensive scrutiny through the use of Epicurean Kanon (Canon, Criterion). Epicurus proved each principle's validity using analogical thought and Aristotelian reasoning.

Based my argument on the method of the French academic J.M. Gabaude, I will refer to each one of these principles and their corresponding forms of proof:

1. There are bodies. Our senses confirm it.
2. Everything that happens has one or more causes of happening. The opposite cannot be confirmed through our senses.
3. Nothing is born out of nothing. The opposite cannot be confirmed.
4. Nothing is annihilated. The opposite argument is unconfirmed.
5. The whole consists of bodies. Our senses can confirm it.
6. The whole also consists of the void. The opposite can be ruled out through reductio ad absurdum (proof by contradiction).
7. Atoms possess a complete state of existence which is unchanged and unbroken. The opposite argument is refuted.
8. Each atom is impenetrable. No space can be simultaneously occupied by two different bodies. The opposite is invalid.
9. The whole is infinite. The opposite argument is invalid.
10. Void is infinite. The opposite argument is invalid.
11. The number of atoms is infinite. The opposite argument is invalid.
12. Atoms move ceaselessly. The opposite argument is invalid.
13. Each composite body possesses properties that the particles comprising it do not possess (principle of emergence-the basis of Chemistry)
14. There is no expediency in nature. There is no divine intervention. The opposite argument is invalid.
15. What is considered as necessary integrates the element of probability. There is a random or 'by chance' element occurring in nature. The opposite is not valid.
16. The birth of a compound body is achieved through the union of atoms. The opposite is invalid.
17. Every composite body is temporary, and when it is destroyed, it is divided into the atoms that comprised it. The opposite is invalid.
18. There are two levels of reality, the level of atoms within the void that is timeless and the level of the sensible world set in time. The opposite holds no validity."

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2023 at 3:55 PM

I presume we are seeing a little roughness in the Greek to English translation, but aside from that what do you make of the list Nate? The "confirmed" and "cannot be confirmed" by the senses, but harder to tell about the "valid / invalid" labeling.

Post by “Todd” of January 11, 2023 at 4:27 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

18. There are two levels of reality, the level of atoms within the void that is timeless and the level of the sensible world set in time. The opposite holds no validity."

This is new to me, and a bit surprising. Did Epicurus say this? Where is it coming from?

Sounds almost Platonic.

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2023 at 4:45 PM

Todd I think this is a fair implication of what is stated in the letter to Herodotus and in Book One of Lucretius, but I too question whether it is sufficient to address the ultimate issue that concerns us. I think the point Epicurus wanted to drive home is that while both levels are "real," our level of reality is no less real than the atomic level. Our reality comes through the senses, without which we have death, and that is what is important to us and why we don't give in to Platonic arguments about a "true world" beyond our senses, as if ours is inferior and we should long to be somewhere else.

If you're not familiar with the Book One discussion of the Trojan war and properties and qualities, you will want to look that up.

Post by “Todd” of January 11, 2023 at 5:58 PM

I'm not seeing anything in the Letter to Herodotus or Book 1 that I take to be suggesting 2 levels of reality. I only noticed some references to there being things we can see and things we can't see. (I was skimming quickly, so maybe I missed something.)

That seems a far cry from saying there are 2 levels of reality. You might as well say there are things we can smell and things we can't smell.

If anyone has a more specific reference for this "two levels" idea, I'd appreciate it.

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2023 at 6:01 PM

Todd I think most commentators generally look to the parts I am going to cite below for the proposition that the atoms and void are eternal and unchanging (which is one level of reality) while the bodies that we see and touch and feel are emergent properties and our level of reality. Maybe you would not refer to this as "levels of reality" but I would say that it's reasonable to refer to it that way.

Lucretius Book One:

[430] Besides these there is nothing which you could say is parted from all body and sundered from void, which could be discovered, as it were a third nature in the list. For whatever shall exist, must needs be something in itself; and if it suffer touch, however small and light, it will increase the count of body by a bulk great or maybe small, if it exists at all, and be added to its sum. But if it is not to be touched, inasmuch as it cannot on any side check anything from wandering through it and passing on its way, in truth it will be that which we call empty void. Or again, whatsoever exists by itself, will either do something or suffer itself while other things act upon it, or it will be such that things may exist and go on in it. But nothing can do or suffer without body, nor afford room again, unless it be void and empty space. And so besides void and bodies no third nature by itself can be left in the list of things, which might either at any time fall within the purview of our senses, or be grasped by any one through reasoning of the mind.

[449] For all things that have a name, you will find either properties linked to these two things or you will see them to be their accidents. That is a property which in no case can be sundered or separated without the fatal disunion of the thing, as is weight to rocks, heat to fire, moisture to water, touch to all bodies, intangibility to the void. On the other hand, slavery, poverty, riches, liberty, war, concord, and other things by whose coming and going the nature of things abides untouched, these we are used, as is natural, to call accidents. Even so time exists not by itself, but from actual things comes a feeling, what was brought to a close in time past, then

what is present now, and further what is going to be hereafter. And it must be avowed that no man feels time by itself apart from the motion or quiet rest of things.

[464] Then again, when men say that ‘the rape of Tyndarus’s daughter’, or ‘the vanquishing of the Trojan tribes in war’ are things, beware that they do not perchance constrain us to avow that these things exist in themselves, just because the past ages have carried off beyond recall those races of men, of whom, in truth, these were the accidents. For firstly, we might well say that whatsoever has happened is an accident in one case of the countries, in another even of the regions of space. Or again, if there had been no substance of things nor place and space, in which all things are carried on, never would the flame of love have been fired by the beauty of Tyndaris, nor swelling deep in the Phrygian heart of Alexander have kindled the burning battles of savage war, nor unknown of the Trojans would the timber horse have set Pergama aflame at dead of night, when the sons of the Greeks issued from its womb. So that you may see clearly that all events from first to last do not exist, and are not by themselves like body, nor can they be spoken of in the same way as the being of the void, but rather so that you might justly call them the accidents of body and place, in which they are carried on, one and all.

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2023 at 6:03 PM

Similar discussion in the letter to Herodotus:

[54] Moreover, we must suppose that the atoms do not possess any of the qualities belonging to perceptible things, except shape, weight, and size, and all that necessarily goes with shape. For every quality changes; but the atoms do not change at all, since there must needs be something which remains solid and indissoluble at the dissolution of compounds, which can cause changes; not changes into the nonexistent or from the non-existent, but changes effected by the shifting of position of some particles, and by the addition or departure of others. For this reason it is essential that the bodies which shift their position should be imperishable and should not possess the nature of what changes, but parts and configuration of their own. For thus much must needs remain constant.

[55] For even in things perceptible to us which change their shape by the withdrawal of matter it is seen that shape remains to them, whereas the qualities do not remain in the changing object, in the way in which shape is left behind, but are lost from the entire body. Now these particles which are left behind are sufficient to cause the differences in compound bodies, since it is essential that some things should be left behind and not be destroyed into the non-existent.

Moreover, we must not either suppose that every size exists among the atoms, in order that the evidence of phenomena may not contradict us, but we must suppose that there are some variations of size. For if this be the case, we can give a better account of what occurs in our feelings and sensations.

[56] But the existence of atoms of every size is not required to explain the differences of qualities in things, and at the same time some atoms would be bound to come within our ken and be visible; but this is never seen to be the case, nor is it possible to imagine how an atom could become visible.

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2023 at 6:09 PM

And Todd also I realized in looking for the quotes that there are really lots of other observations in the book, and even in Book 4 where images are discussed, that could be used to bolster this argument, but which don't explicitly say "Two levels of reality." It's a good question as to how best to bring this out.

I would also site the Diogenes of Oinoanda point in support of this. The flux exists at the atomic level, but we can apprehend the result at our level:

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.

Post by “Todd” of January 11, 2023 at 6:09 PM

Yeah, I get the point. I guess I just don't like the sound of two levels of reality. Sounds dangerously close to "two realities".

Post by “Cassius” of January 11, 2023 at 6:10 PM

Yep I agree, and yet this is the way everyone seems to want to address the issue, so we have to find a way to deal with the point convincingly. Maybe, as Kalosyni might say, even "metaphorically!" 😊

Post by “Todd” of January 11, 2023 at 6:46 PM

Another way of stating my issue with the "two levels of reality" (or perhaps another problem with it)...

The so-called "two levels" are not actually any property (or accident) of reality. The two levels are a result of the limits of our ability to perceive reality. There is what we can perceive and what we cannot perceive. Reality is just what is.

If at some time in the distant future, humans evolved the ability to see (or otherwise perceive) atoms directly, would reality have changed in any way? No, only our ability to perceive it would have changed.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 11, 2023 at 9:48 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

I'm not seeing anything in the Letter to Herodotus or Book 1 that I take to be suggesting 2 levels of reality. I only noticed some references to there being things we can see and things we can't see. (I was skimming quickly, so maybe I missed something.)

That seems a far cry from saying there are 2 levels of reality. You might as well say there are things we can smell and things we can't smell.

If anyone has a more specific reference for this "two levels" idea, I'd appreciate it.

Their describing "the level of atoms" as "timeless", versus "the level of the sensible world" which is "set in time" definitely has a Platonic tinge to it. This seems to contradict the way "time" is used in the *Epistle To Herodotus*:

"Moreover, their passage through the void [...] accomplishes every comprehensible distance in an inconceivably short time. [...] even in the least period of continuous time all the atoms in aggregate bodies move" (46b.1-62.7).

Post by "Don" of January 11, 2023 at 9:55 PM

This goes back to Democritus:

νόμῳ (γάρ φησι) γλυκὸν καὶ νόμῳ πικρὸν, νόμῳ θερμὸν, νόμῳ ψυχρὸν, νόμῳ χροίῃ, ἔτεῃ δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν (Tetralogies of Thrasyllus, 9; Sext. Emp. adv. math. VII 135)

Sweet exists by convention, bitter by convention, colour by convention; atoms and Void [alone] exist in reality. (trans. Freeman 1948)[1], p. 92.

By convention sweet is sweet, bitter is bitter, hot is hot, cold is cold, color is color; but in truth there are only atoms and the void. (trans. Durant 1939)[2], Ch. XVI, §II, p. 353; citing C. Bakewell, Sourcebook in Ancient Philosophy, New York, 1909, "Fragment O" (Diels), p. 60

Post by "Don" of January 11, 2023 at 10:27 PM

Along with Democritus's quote, it is a fact that sweet, bitter, and color are emergent properties of the atoms. Even my mind is an emergent property of my atoms that have no mind of their own. Atoms have no taste, color, etc., but in their configurations, they give rise to the phenomena of the cosmos which I experience on a day to day basis.

I personally have no problem accepting that there are "two levels" of reality, of the physical universe. I don't live in the realm of atoms, but I know its there. The fact that my physical senses that I feel are in reality *ultimately* composed of atoms and void doesn't make them

any less real *for me.* Being composed of atoms doesn't lessen the "meaning" of my life (whatever that means... I'm not overly fond of the "M word.")

Post by “Cassius” of January 12, 2023 at 7:13 AM

Thanks for the reminder of that Democritus quote, which Joshua cites regularly on the podcast. I don't know whether Democritus intended this in the original, or whether it is just an artifact of the translation, but it looks like the distinction between one level being real and another level being unreal goes back to Democritus himself. Did he know or intend that this formulation be taken to imply ethically that our world lacks "reality" such that we should view it as a mirage or illusion, or was it purely a scientific observation? Epicurus makes much the same observation, but by stressing that the senses are able to comprehend things (such as Diogenes of Oinoanda says about the flux) the resulting tone seems different.

Maybe Democritus' tone would seem different to us if we had more of his work, or maybe this was an area (like determinism) where Epicurus was modifying what Democritus had taught. Was Democritus laughing because he was truly happy, or was his laughter cynical and to the effect that people are nothing but whirling windbags of atoms bouncing around with no more intelligence than billiard balls?

Post by “Don” of January 12, 2023 at 8:01 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Maybe Democritus' tone would seem different to us if we had more of his work, or maybe this was an area (like determinism) where Epicurus was modifying what Democritus had taught.

You're right. Either is a possibility.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Was Democritus laughing because he was truly happy, or was his laughter cynical and to the effect that people are nothing but whirling windbags of atoms bouncing around with no more intelligence than billiard balls?

My take has always been that Democritus is laughing because he doesn't take himself too seriously, in the end we're all atoms and void. I think he can laugh about people who get caught up in the rat race (to use a modern metaphor) and take themselves too seriously. People - all things! - really are *ultimately* nothing more than "whirling windbags of atoms." That doesn't mean in any way that we don't enjoy our lives at the level we experience them! But chill out! Take a breath! Carpe diem - pluck the fruit of each moment.

PS. From Heraclitus 's Wikipedia article:

Weeping philosopher

In Lucian of Samosata's "Philosophies for Sale," Heraclitus is auctioned off as the "weeping philosopher" alongside Democritus, who is known as the "laughing philosopher" part of the weeping and laughing philosopher motif. This pairing, which may have originated with the Cynic philosopher Menippus, has been portrayed several times in renaissance art, where it generally references their reactions to the folly of mankind.[better source needed] Heraclitus also appears in Raphael's School of Athens.

Post by “Cassius” of January 12, 2023 at 9:14 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

My take has always been that Democritus is laughing because he doesn't take himself too seriously, in the end we're all atoms and void. I think he can laugh about people who get caught up in the rat race (to use a modern metaphor) and take themselves too seriously. People - all things! - really are *ultimately* nothing more than "whirling windbags of atoms." That doesn't mean in any way that we don't enjoy our lives at the level we experience them! But chill out! Take a breath! Carpe diem - pluck the fruit of each moment.

Yep the issue is that we have to both not take ourselves and our lives *too* seriously, while at the same time avoiding the pitfall of not taking ourselves and our lives seriously enough. Sort of like the perspective required in:

[VS63](#). Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess.

To me this relates to the ongoing "metaphor" discussion in a [nearby thread](#). In the end it might not be possible for many people to keep that proper balance between "not-too-serious" and "not-serious-enough" using purely intellectual analysis. Getting the result right seems to require

metaphors/art/literature/music/etc to allow people to get an emotional grip on the situation in addition to an intellectual grip. And of course "health" is required too.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 12, 2023 at 12:22 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I presume we are seeing a little roughness in the Greek to English translation, but aside from that what do you make of the list Nate? The "confirmed" and "cannot be confirmed" by the senses, but harder to tell about the "valid / invalid" labeling.

I am still deconstructing the expressions that the author employs to explain the principles of Epicurus' analogical logic, so I am reserving an opinion about the second statements of each point.

For the most part, I find that the list coheres with the beginning of the *Epistle To Herodotus* and the elementary propositions defined therein. There are several items (as I predicted) which they organized as two separate points (*infinite void* and *infinite particles* being one example) instead of one. I think this is inevitable and mostly inconsequential. Like I mentioned before, I would be comfortable merging the first two propositions (*no creation* and *no destruction*) into one, though I am equally happy to recognize it as two, distinct points. Some of the points are two sides of the same observation, and can be appropriately expressed as such, so I am fine with those.

I think that some of their points are a little redundant. For example, 1. (*that bodies exist*) and 5. (*that everything consists of bodies, except 6. void*). Also, point 2. (*the principle of linear, temporal causality, that one or more causes precede an effect*) seems to be implied by 3. and 4. (*that nothing is born out of nothing, and that nothing is annihilated*). Also, points 7. (*atoms having an unchanging and unbroken existence*) and 8. (*atoms being impenetrable*) seem to be derivative of 4. (*nothing being annihilated*) so I would not personally include them. Point 14. (*no divine intervention*) seems implied by their recognition of 2. (*things have temporal causes*) and 5. (*everything is made of bodies*).

As [Todd](#) mentioned, 18. seems almost Platonic, and I do not find support for this proposition in Epicurus' texts. I may be missing something in translation, but at this point I do not accept this one.

I will need to dig through what the author calls "analogical" and "Aristotelian logic" because I imagine that this criterion helped them organize each of their points, even when some seem (to me) to be redundant.

Post by “Todd” of January 12, 2023 at 12:44 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

As Todd mentioned, #18 seems almost Platonic, and I do not find support for this proposition in Epicurus’ texts. I may be missing something in translation, but at this point I do not accept this one.

They also claim that this is proven because the opposite is invalid.

What is the opposite of 2 levels of reality? One, three, ten? Zero? Offhand, I can think of atomic/sub-atomic, molecular, cellular, <whatever you want to call the human-scale things>, geological, cosmological. I'm sure there are others, and also that the people who specialize in those fields break them down even further.

I'd be happy to talk about different aspects of reality instead of levels. "Aspect" implies an observer, rather than something inherent in the thing observed.

Post by “Don” of January 12, 2023 at 2:40 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

As Todd mentioned, #18 seems almost Platonic, and I do not find support for this proposition in Epicurus’ texts. I may be missing something in translation, but at this point I do not accept this one.

I don't like the "levels" in 18. That doesn't sound right. One text that ***maybe*** gets at 18's sentiment is from the end of the epistle to Herodotus:

Quote

81] "There is yet one more point to seize, namely, that the greatest anxiety of the human mind arises through the belief that the heavenly bodies are blessed and indestructible, and that at the same time they have volitions and actions and causality inconsistent with this belief ; and through expecting or apprehending some everlasting

evil, either because of the myths, or because we are in dread of the mere insensibility of death, as if it had to do with us ; and through being reduced to this state not by conviction but by a certain irrational perversity, so that, if men do not set bounds to their terror, they endure as much or even more intense anxiety than the man whose views on these matters are quite vague. [82] But mental tranquillity (ἀταραξία ataraxia) means being released from all these troubles and cherishing a continual remembrance of the highest and most important truths.

[82] ...καὶ συνεχῆ μνήμην ἔχειν τῶν ὅλων καὶ κυριωτάτων.

... and having a constant memory...

τῶν ὅλων "of the whole"

(Interestingly τὸ ὅλον can also mean the universe, as in "the whole thing!"; differing from τὸ πᾶν, as implying a definite order)

... and κυριωτάτων of the highest/most important things.

(the superlative of κύριος kyrios as in κυριαὶ δοξαὶ Kyriai Doxai "Principle Doctrines")

I take that to mean we need to constantly remember that everything is reducible to atoms and void. Everything! If we remember that, we won't be fooled into looking for supernatural causes and all the rest.

Post by “Joshua” of January 12, 2023 at 5:53 PM

Richard Dawkins proposed a line of thinking several years ago that might shed light on the whole "different levels of reality" issue. He suggested four different 'worlds' that living organisms might model for themselves in order to be better suited for their own size and speed;

- Atomic Scale (hypothetical)
- Microbe/Insect scale
- Animal Scale
- Cosmic Scale (Hypothetical)

Essentially what he's doing is extrapolating from the two middle scales outward in both directions to get to the hypothetical edges. The edges are hypothetical not because they don't exist in reality, but because there are no known organisms that operate in such a way as to require them to successfully model physics at those scales. In reality, there are more "worlds"

modeled than the ones above--for example, blue herons model movement under water far better than humans do, because herons stand above the surface of water and hunt fast moving prey below it. Another example; creatures that live in ocean depths would model their world differently to those on dry land, or to those floating on air currents high above land. And further; the strange ability of hive insects to find their way back to the hive by 'recording' distance and estimating angles. There are apparently ants that can do this, or something very much like it.

Here's the general idea; at different scales, different physical forces interact in interesting ways. Here's one example; humans can't stand on water, but some insects can. At the insect scale, the forces of surface tension and air friction "outweigh" the force of gravity. They can walk on water, fall from high places without injury, etc. The result of this is that insects will be better fit for survival if they can successfully model surface tension, and humans will be better fit for survival if they can successfully model gravity. Nature is the same at each scale, but its implications for living things are different. If you were to imagine a whale-like animal the size of an asteroid that could live in space, the whale would need to successfully model things like the two body problem, inertial movement in a frictionless environment, how to use gravity wells as 'slingshots', and how to avoid falling into them--precisely the kinds of things that NASA needs to model when sending out probes and shuttles.

For more information:

- A short Wikipedia [page](#) on this topic.
- [This](#) TEDtalk starting around the five minute mark.

Post by “Cassius” of January 12, 2023 at 7:16 PM

It's certainly important to understand the issue of perspective, and it's pretty direct to illustrate the issue according to size. That works well.

I wonder if there is any other category of concern that we are seeing when we consider these formulations to be Platonic and therefore objectionable.

Is it a full statement of the issue to boil it down to "if there's another level of reality, then our level of reality is therefore less important (sort of a slippery slope to a nihilistic "our reality doesn't matter" perspective)?

If you see what I am asking, I am saying I think that what I have described (probably poorly) is probably the major issue. I am wondering if there are any other or related issues involved other

than this?

Post by “Todd” of January 12, 2023 at 8:21 PM

From my perspective, I see 4 issues (but I reserve the right to identify more!)

1. Levels. This is just about terminology to me. I don't think I have any concerns about the ideas being described (so far as I understand them). But "2 levels of reality" sounds Platonic. It sounds kind of close to "2 realities". As [Cassius](#) has noted, if there are multiple levels, is one better, or more important somehow? It also has kind of a gnostic tinge...like there is secret knowledge about other levels of reality that will eventually be revealed to those who progress in their studies. Just everything about the word feels wrong to me. All this would be resolved by just using "aspect" or some other word instead of "levels". To me, this is about clarity of explanation.
 2. Two. If there are multiple levels or aspects, why only 2?
 3. Timeless. I think I know where they're getting this from. If they just mean "eternal" or always existing, I'm fine with that, I just think they should use a different word. I suspect they may mean something else, and I would disagree. I'd be happy to expand if anyone wants to dive into it.
 4. I don't think this idea deserves to be elevated to the level of a fundamental principle, or whatever they are calling them. As I've said before, this is not even an attribute of reality. It is a matter of the perspective of the observer.
-

Post by “Cassius” of January 12, 2023 at 9:00 PM

Todd in your item 4 "this idea" is a reference to point 3, or to something else. I agree with all your points but wanted to be sure I understood this one.

Post by “Todd” of January 12, 2023 at 9:11 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Todd in your item 4 "this idea" is a reference to point 3, or to something else. I agree with all your points but wanted to be sure I understood this one.

I'm referring to their entire #18.

In reading the texts you quoted yesterday, I just don't see how this is any kind of key takeaway. I couldn't even see where it was explicitly stated. Implied, OK...but does that qualify it to be a fundamental principle?

(I mean it's obviously subjective as to what would qualify, as Nate has amply shown. This one seems like a big stretch to me.)

Post by "Cassius" of January 12, 2023 at 9:39 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

In reading the texts you quoted yesterday, I just don't see how this is any kind of key takeaway. I couldn't even see where it was explicitly stated. Implied, OK...but does that qualify it to be a fundamental principle?

I think I see why it is tempting to include a summary statement about the level of bodies with their emergent properties being just as "real" as the level of atoms and void. I see that myself as a hugely important point to make as the way to understand atomism that does not lead to nihilism/despair. But I am not sure it is really a principle of physics as much as it is a point of epistemology and maybe even ethics, so I agree that it's not really a physics principle.

And I am not sure that there is much evidence that this was an issue that the ancient Epicureans were concerned about -- the whole subject may be something that modern philosophies and perspectives have made it necessary to address.

But I am not sure about that, and maybe we will find more ancient Epicurean texts some day that bring out this point more clearly. And maybe there are more already that aren't known to me.

To me this is much the same issue as Paul complaining about his flock being slaves to the "weak and beggarly elements." Maybe the whole question is so implicit in any discussion of atomism that we'd see that Epicurus himself addressed it if we had more texts.

Post by “Todd” of January 12, 2023 at 10:09 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think I see why it is tempting to include a summary statement about the level of bodies with their emergent properties being just as "real" as the level of atoms and void. I see that myself as a hugely important point to make as the way to understand atomism that does not lead to nihilism/despair

To me, it just seems obvious that it's all one reality. I can't even imagine thinking otherwise.

If anything, I'd go the opposite direction: what I see around me and interact with every day is obviously real; it's what I can't see that I would be tempted to question.

To someone who sees atomism as leading to nihilism or despair, I'd say they're forgetting the part about relying on the senses.

Using the right words helps too. Different aspects of one reality.

Post by “Cassius” of January 12, 2023 at 10:22 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

To someone who sees atomism as leading to nihilism or despair, I'd say they're forgetting the part about relying on the senses

Or they are letting the Platonists convince them that the senses are ultimately untrustworthy and inferior to pure reason or revelation which the Platonists have successfully done to most of the world.

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 13, 2023 at 8:24 AM

[Quote from Nate](#)

... and I'm willing to bet a discussion on *epibolai tês dianoiás* is to shortly follow. 😊

So, later in the book, the offer non-lucid dreams as an example of the "extra" leg of the Canon.

"The imaginary impositions of the mind. *The third criterion of truth, the imaginary imposition of the mind, is its attachment to representations (images) created in it. The imaginary imposition of the mind is of various kinds:*

1) *Depictions from direct sensory perception are classified by the Epicureans in senses or, if repeated, in preconceptions.*

2) *Depictions not derived from a direct sense include images of the unconscious, for example, the dreamlike depictions during sleep. For Epicurus, there is no distinction. He argues that 'what moved us is true, even the dreams of the lunatics, because only the non-existing does not affect us.' So, we have an ancient philosophical school which sees the value of analyzing the images of the unconscious in dreams and urges us to seek the truth that they may hide. Many centuries later, with the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams, Freud proved, in his way, of course, that these interpretations are true for a specific individual.*

The Epicurean philosophy does not give dreams any prophetic properties, as other ancient schools did, but observes with caution how our desires and especially our fears are displayed in the form of depictions during sleep. Many of these images have no direct sensory origin. The sage knows well that these fears often cause pain, so Epicureans consider this attachment to images of the unconscious as a criterion of truth."

Post by "Cassius" of January 13, 2023 at 9:17 AM

Other than the point about not giving dreams prophetic properties, which would certainly be correct, something bothers me about most of the other formulations there.

While I understand the point that we should consider them as events that are real in our minds, I just don't see clarity in considering dreams criteria of truth.

Post by "Cassius" of January 13, 2023 at 10:08 AM

One reason for my concern would be that if we are focusing on "images" as the topic of the discussion, then why not just consider the receipt of images, as Lucretius does in Book IV, along with the other phenomena of the senses like seeing, hearing, etc.? It's not like Epicurus said (as far as we know) that there are only 5 senses. Lucretius talks about those 5 in the same chapter as he discusses images, so if someone wanted to focus on the information derived from images directly by the mind, I don't see why that would not constitute just an extension of the "sense" leg, rather than an entirely separate fourth leg.

Post by “Don” of January 13, 2023 at 11:03 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

just consider the receipt of images, as Lucretius does in Book IV, along with the other phenomena of the senses like seeing, hearing, etc.?

That's always been my take. The mind is just a sensory "organ" that perceives subtle images.

And we know now, there are more than the 5 traditional senses (see one of my other posts), but even just adding on the mind makes 6.

Post by “Cassius” of January 13, 2023 at 11:03 AM

Probably bears repeating that I don't think it's too productive to get too far into the weeds on these issues without looking back at the big picture.

It seems to me that the big picture is that Epicurus is saying that Nature equips us with faculties through which we can make sense of what is going on around us, and that those faculties operate naturally and are not divine or prophetic or inherently deceptive in nature. Using those faculties we can make sense of many things within the flux and we don't have to throw up our hands and give in to radical skepticism. We also don't have to worry that there is some divine or ideal or true world to which we can get access only through revelation or esoteric logical maneuvering.

As far as the details of what those faculties are and how they operate, some of that is obvious (that the senses are honest but don't constitute truth in themselves - we have to evaluate the

data to decide what we think is true) and some of it is less obvious (that the mind can be influenced by things other than the 5 classic senses - which is where the images apparently come in as a proposed explanation).

I certainly think there can be lots of varying positions and disagreements about how to get into the details of how these faculties operate, and that's largely a matter of advancing scientific knowledge that we gain through better technology. But the bigger picture that all this is natural simply gets clarified in details by the advancing technology, it doesn't get reversed or called into serious question.

Post by “Cassius” of January 13, 2023 at 11:08 AM

Also, I was trying to think of examples of phenomena that might not seem crazy to entertain.

It's not just in movies, but how many times have we "felt" that someone out of our vision was looking at us. Maybe I've seen too many war movies where the explorers say "We're being watched" but I do from personal experience think that there are times we "feel" something going on which is not strictly a matter of hearing rustling leaves or catching glimpses of things out of the corner of our eyes. I need to read back up the thread to see the list Don gave, but I don't think it is likely a good bet to draw a bright line at "five" or "six" or "ten" or whatever. The big issue is whatever there is is going to be natural, and in order to believe it it's going to require repetition and some kind of concrete demonstration of its reality.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 13, 2023 at 11:22 AM

That all makes sense. Where I get a little mystified is with the *epibolai of the dianoia* as these seem to be more than a sensation. To me, it seems too obvious to consider that the way the images are received is a type of sensation: there wouldn't have been any disagreement with that unless there is something more involved. Would that thing be something between a sensation and a conscious thought, and would it have some function relating to, but different from, an anticipation? If so, understanding that could be illuminating.

Post by “Don” of January 13, 2023 at 1:38 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I need to read back up the thread to see the list Don gave, but I don't think it is likely a good bet to draw a bright line at "five" or "six" or "ten" or whatever.

Post

[RE: Episode 155 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 11 - The Canon, Reason, and Nature 02](#)

It's also important to remember we have more than "5" senses, including, at least:

1. Vision
2. Hearing
3. Smell
4. Taste
5. Touch
6. Balance (vestibular sense)
7. Temperature
8. Proprioception (body awareness)
9. Pain (nociception)

<https://www.press.jhu.edu/newsroom/how-many-senses-do-we-have>

See also

<https://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/best/senses.html>



Don

January 10, 2023 at 10:50 PM

Post by "Cassius" of January 13, 2023 at 1:47 PM

From Don's link:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2823-epicurean-philosophy-an-introduction-from-the-garden-of-athens-edited-by-christo/>

[Quote from Nate](#)

[Quote from Nate](#)

... and I'm willing to bet a discussion on *epibolai tês dianoiás* is to shortly follow. 😊

So, later in the book, the offer non-lucid dreams as an example of the "extra" leg of the Canon.

"The imaginary impositions of the mind. *The third criterion of truth, the imaginary imposition of the mind, is its attachment to representations (images) created in it. The imaginary imposition of the mind is of various kinds:*

1) *Depictions from direct sensory perception are classified by the Epicureans in senses or, if repeated, in preconceptions.*

2) *Depictions not derived from a direct sense include images of the unconscious, for example, the dreamlike depictions during sleep. For Epicurus, there is no distinction. He argues that 'what moved us is true, even the dreams of the lunatics, because only the non-existing does not affect us.' So, we have an ancient philosophical school which sees the value of analyzing the images of the unconscious in dreams and urges us to seek the truth that they may hide. Many centuries later, with the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams, Freud proved, in his way, of course, that these interpretations are true for a specific individual.*

The Epicurean philosophy does not give dreams any prophetic properties, as other ancient schools did, but observes with caution how our desires and especially our fears are displayed in the form of depictions during sleep. Many of these images have no direct sensory origin. The sage knows well that these fears often cause pain, so Epicureans consider this attachment to images of the unconscious as a criterion of truth."

Display More

The suggestion that dreams are as reliable as sensation reminds me of the movie "Minority Report". Are you all guys familiar with it? Law enforcement records the minds of human "precogs" whose prophetic dreams of "precrimes" provide law enforcement with the information needed to prevent crimes before they happen. While the author does acknowledge Epicurus' rejection of "prophecy", they seem to walk a thin line around clairvoyance.

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2023 at 6:54 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2823-epicurean-philosophy-an-introduction-from-the-garden-of-athens-edited-by-christo/>

I have just recently received an email from Christos Yapijakis indicating that he has read through this thread. His comments that I am pasting below were drafted as a private communication to me, rather than as an exhaustive commentary on the various points raised above, so please understand that they are written in that context. I asked him for permission (which he granted) to repost these so as to include them in the discussion.

It has been some time since this thread started and I have not read back through it with an eye toward adding additional commentary myself as I add Christos' notes into the thread. The main thing I want to restate is that I appreciate all the effort and scholarship Christos has put into his work, and also the effort involved by those who have commented here, all of whom I am sure have written in good faith and with constructive intent to help all of us in the pursuit of Epicurean philosophy. From here on in the thread is Christos' comment, minus his personal introductory and closing thoughts. Christos is very busy and may not check in with additional comments anytime soon, but I should make clear that I am posting this not to end the conversation but to encourage additional constructive commentary on these very important subjects.

... I know all that discussion comes from a friendly perspective towards both Epicurus and myself, so let me clarify some points:

1. The paper "Philosophical Management of Stress based on Science and Epicurean Pragmatism: A Pilot Study" describes a program for the general public and is written for the general experts in philosophy, psychology etc. Therefore, it is written in an objective, emotionless, generalized manner so that people all over the world to be convinced that there are some significant scientific findings using the Epicurean approach. It is not about the Epicurean philosophy per se and that is why we speak about happiness (ataraxia/aponia) and not about pleasure (the paper on Epicurean eustatheia on the other hand describes more in depth the Epicurean philosophy).

2. The tripartite brain is still a sound model in neurobiology (I am an expert in neurogenetics and George Chrousos is an expert in stress neurobiology). Of course the brain is more interconnected and more complicated than that, but that simple model is useful philosophically for the lay people to grasp the main characteristics of human potential. This is the most Epicurean approach possible. Epicurus was not interested for the little details as much as the big picture of things. The details are for specialists, the big picture and the first principles are for everyone to grasp to avoid confusion and fear of the unknown.

3. Regarding pleasure and happiness, just see [Epicurus' Letter to Menoecus](#) that explicitly says that:

-We aim to happiness (eustatheia of katastematic pleasure/pleasurable state)

-We do not need pleasure unless our body is in pain lacking it

"He who has a clear and certain understanding of these things will direct every preference and aversion toward **securing health of body** and **tranquility of mind**, seeing that this is the sum and end of a **happy life**. For the end of all our actions is to be **free from pain and fear**, and, when once we have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living being has no need to go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled. When we are pained lacking pleasure, **then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure**".

4. Regarding useful and harmful pleasures, again see [Epicurus' Letter to Menoecus](#) that explicitly says that:

-Although pleasure is naturally akin to us, some pleasures lead to greater annoyance than pleasure

-Useful pleasures=those that appease pain or vary our enjoyment of life (the second ones we don't need necessarily)

-Harmful pleasures=those that result in more pain than pleasure

"...**we do not choose every pleasure whatever**, but often pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them. And often we consider pains superior to pleasures when submission to the pains for a long time brings us as a consequence a greater pleasure. While therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, **not all pleasure is worthy of choice**, just as all pain is an evil and yet not all pain is to be shunned. It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the **conveniences** and **inconveniences**, that all these matters must be judged. "

All three papers I authored in that special issue of Conatus-Journal of Philosophy on "Philosophical Management of Stress" (the first ever such issue of an international philosophical journal and I was invited to be the Editor) promote Epicurean philosophy, although they do that in a more subtle, "politically correct" and objective way discussing other philosophical approaches too, which by comparison are barely useful for a very short period of time until reality prevails.

I hope I have made my point to you. I rest my case, as you say in court.

NOTE: In a subsequent followup, Christos included the following, which I think is relevant to the same discussion:

Always remember that the pursuit of pleasure is the path to eustatheia and happiness (katastematic pleasure or pleasurable state) for Epicurus and not a goal by itself as Aristippus or 'prodigals' think (see letter to Menoecus DL 131-132).

All the best wishes.

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2023 at 8:01 PM

Before I comment much more myself in this thread I would very much like to hear what others think. In the meantime, though, I have [supplemented an earlier thread which may become relevant](#) here.

Post by “Joshua” of January 27, 2023 at 8:09 PM

I'm ashamed to say I still haven't read his book, so there will be no help forthcoming from me in the near future.

Post by “Kalosyni” of January 28, 2023 at 8:01 AM

The quote in post 58 above: "The tripartite brain is still a sound model in neurobiology".

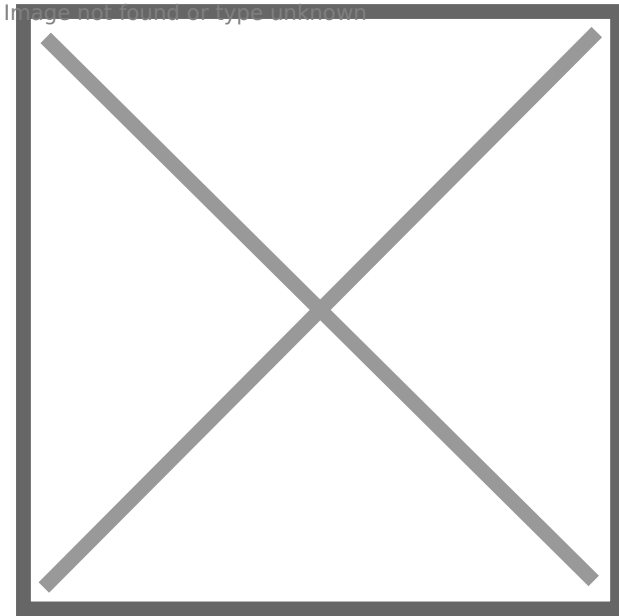
I found this interesting article for people who want to dive into the details:

[The Brain Is Adaptive Not Triune: How the Brain Responds to Threat, Challenge, and Change](#)

Theory impacts how research is conducted. A popular theory used to conceptualize brain functioning is the triune brain theory. The triune brain theory is an...

www.frontiersin.org

And for further commentary:



[The "Triune brain" model is obsolete, what is the name of the model that replaces it?](#)

The Triune brain model suggests our brains evolved adding more layers, a lizard brain, then a mammal brain, then a new human brain. As that's false, and the...
psychology.stackexchange.com

This interesting comment from the psychology.stackexchange:

Quote

There isn't a new model, exactly, since as the poster stated, the brain doesn't operate as a model and earlier versions of brain structures simply modify themselves to evolve— it's one brain. Meaning, one's "lizard brain" is actually just a mammalian brain now. The new model perhaps is The Human Brain? But given that the Triune model was most popularized by lawyers needing it for defense against emotional (irrational) behavior and psychologists adopted it for explanation of emotional dysregulation, then likely the best replacement is theory about emotion. Emotions are not well understood, and there are several theories about them, but the latest and most provocative development is the Theory of Constructed Emotion. See Barrett-Feldman et al.

Post by "Pacatus" of January 28, 2023 at 1:49 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2823-epicurean-philosophy-an-introduction-from-the-garden-of-athens-edited-by-christo/>

But at the very least I think it is safe to say philosophically that when you think you have a divine sanction, or a categorical imperative that everyone should follow the same rules all the time and everywhere, then you have a strong tendency to plant seeds that will likely grow into a major conflict that will violate all sorts of otherwise ethical norms.

