

Plato's Timaeus vs. On Nature, Book 14

Post by “Bryan” of January 24, 2025 at 2:17 AM

To the extent that Epíkouros' Book Fourteen On Nature is not a direct refutation of sections of Plato's *Timaeus*, it certainly presupposes familiarity with the material. Before we go through this in the upcoming Wednesday meetings, ideally, we should develop the same common ground.

There are several good audiobook versions on YouTube. Please find your favorite reader and listen to it at 0.80 speed until you become as infuriated with Plato's math-magic as Epíkouros is in Book Fourteen.

"This is also desirable: that one who is entirely afflicted by such over-questionings has a kind of remedy – through which it is possible that a simple condition [of life, focused] in the observation of nature will set free their innate trouble."

--Epíkouros, Peri Phýseōs, Book 14, P.Herc. 1148 col. 24

Post by “Don” of January 24, 2025 at 3:34 AM

FWIW... Here's my VERY clunky translation of the French (primarily Google Translate but some other methods and notes) directly from *Les Epicuriens*.

ON NATURE, BOOK XIV

[DCLP/Trismegistos 59752 = LDAB 856](#)

[Pher. 1148: (29) Arrighetti in part]

[a: p. 46 Leone: (29.1)]...circumferences [lac. 2 lines] or rapid [ou rapides] [lac. 1 word] those who meet [lac. 1 line] undergo interlacing...

[2:p. 47 Leone] ... [what is] seen [lac. 1 word] seems to have the same [lac. 1 word] [and] larger size deviations than [lac. 2 words] for the senses...

[3 : p. 47 Leone)... insofar as we conceive through reason the transferences in it. But depending on whether [lac. 2 words] some kind [lac. 1 line] what is similar [lac. 2 columns].

[6:p. 48 Leone] [le pensée] the thought. [We affirm it,] the [lac. 1 line] is made up of the [elements] of which the associations are made up [lac. of 5 columns].

[12: p. 50 Leone: (29.7)] ... to each of the conclusions [lac. 1 word], and which cause trouble [lac. 10 columns].

[23 p. 16 Leone] ... of this therapy [lac. 2 words] which intensifies [lac. 2 words]. Therefore, not even for ... possesses [lac. 1 word]... prosperity.

Epicurus

[24 : p. 56 Leone: (29.3)] ...we must count ourselves fortunate in this, too - that all who are engaged in such trivialities may have some sort of remedy by which it is possible, simply to attain at times calmness in the contemplation of nature, to get rid of their inborn ([σ]υμφύτου; French: connaturel) [trouble; ταραχ]ῆς, which even later [missing 1 column].

[ἀ-]

γαπητ[ὸν] καὶ τοῦτ[ο], τὸ

δὴ πάντα τὸν συνε[χό]με-

νον [ταῖς] τοιαύταις περι-

εργ[ε]ῖαις ἔχειν οἰονὶ φάρ-

μακον δι' οὗ καταστάσεις

ἀπλ[ᾶς ἔστι]ν ἐν τῇι περὶ φύ-

σε[ως θεωρί]αι ἀπαλλαγῆ-

σε[σθαι τῆς σ]υμφύτου ἑαυ-

τα[ῖς ταραχ]ῆς ἢ καὶ ὅστε-

10ρον [..]..... ἠπο.. σιτ..

γε [..]..... ὥστε... υ.

[...]...... τοιοῦ[τοι]ς..

[.....]...... οἷ [..].....

[□ -ca.?- □]

[26:p 17 Leone (29:14)]...would present [lac. 1 or 2 words] an aporia**, and [lat. 3 words] relief, it seems, [to] men... [hommes]

**Note from Les Epicuriens: Perhaps: a needlessly disturbing aporia, which Epicurean physics would allow "to dissipate" (or "to relieve"; on κουφιζειν, see Philodemos, [L'Arrogance], 10, p 620). The two preceding fragments explicitly recall the therapeutic function of this physics (see Capital Maxims, XI and XII)

[DB: aporia: "an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument, or theory."]

[27: p. 57 Leone: (29.16)] In reply to those who say that the substance of water is produced by the condensation of clouds, and who think that this too is a sign that all things come from a single substance which changes its character by condensation and rarefaction...[28: p.57 Leone (29.17)] ...water is composed...of the [lac. 1 word] of the forms which are taken [lac. 1 line] from which this ... water [lac. 2 words] some water [lac. 1 line] be produced.. [29: p. 58 Leone] ... similar impressions they commit a paralogism [lac. 2 lines] sensation [lac. 3 words] attests...

[30:p. 18 Leone: (29.18) ... men do it, but also some of those who are called "philosophers" (and to whom I am charmed, by Zeus, to give this name, if Democritus also must have it): would we oppose all their notions of celestial phenomena and [others of the same species]?

[31 : p. 18 Leone: (29.19)]... which will receive many particles, and from the other associations [lac. 2 lines] of the sky [lac. 2 lines] by rarefaction [lac. 1 line] principle [lac. 2 words] would conclude [lac. 8 lines] from the air... [32: p. 19 Leone: (29.21)] in nature [lac. 3 lines] vaporize [lac. 2 words] water... [33: p.19 Leone: (29.20)] [It is not] according to the condensation or the rarefaction [of the air] that things are generated, but it is according to the differences of forms that the power of deviations manifests [lac. 4 lines] depending on the condensation [lac. 2 lines] is not powerful ...

[34 : p. 19 Leone: (29.22)]. [those] who specify a particular form belonging to fire, earth, water or air, are more ridiculous than those who, without specifying any, according to the juxtapositions, willy-nilly, that certain particular species of forms arise, which correspond to each of the associations which one could call substantial (for some are mistaken on the subject of the elements); but in speaking thus, they would say something that is more in line with these. And generally also they [introduce ?] differences in mixtures, and...

[35: p. 60 Leone: (29.23)] [The Platonists do not explain how one could] conceive of water, air or fire [as solid and indissoluble], since one could not even conceive of the Earth as solid and indissoluble ; even less do they divide them, by making these assertions. For, if none of these bodies has the possibility of being conceived as a solid, it is a great diversity of impressions of forms that [the elements] will deliver, when the cuts are made, and not triangles, pyramids,

cubes or any other specific shape. For [the Platonists] would have no plausible way to explain why we should believe that we can find these four forms visible, when the cuts are made, rather than all kinds of forms. [36: p. 60 Leone: (29.24)]... These sorts of forms, in accordance with their appearances, [are sometimes found in] the remaining elements. But it is not only - even supposing that it is - in the case of fire that an impression of form as he indicates would never appear to arise, and that form would not always arise [in fire], nor as belonging to any kind of fire, but as belonging to that part of the fire which is the flame, and belonging to the latter only in particular environmental conditions. When he approaches these kinds [of fire], he sometimes seems to indicate a different form for fire (in its various forms)

[37: p. 61 Leone: (29.25)] [the fire] escapes the pressure exerted by the air, being itself composed of extremely fine particles, and incapable of being captured by the air into a reassemblable aggregate. For neither the compactness nor the fineness of the particles, in certain quantities, admits the pressure but it is a certain proportionality which, in certain quantities, is able to accomplish just this sort of thing. But this, too, is a ridiculous form of analogical reasoning from impression, which manifests an ignorance of the means of deducing what is not apparent from what is. Furthermore, neither can the Earth in the same way as... [38:p.61 Leone: (29.26)] [Regarding the] triangles, from which [Plato] also constructs the remaining forms, if he believed them to be atomic, why didn't he offer some proof that they are atomic bodies? Or, if he didn't believe they were atomic, why would anyone think that all the other things that you cobble together yourself out of whatever materials are made from these? But there will be another opportunity to extend this discussion. For now, suffice it to say that it turned out, ridiculously, that this man said, in a sense, that punishing [French: punir] was like [lac. 2 words] of forms [lac. 1 line], exactly at the same time he... [39: p. 62 Leone: (29.27)]...the form he specifies is [appropriate in each case] to the affects produced by these four elements - ideally and primarily each of the two, but failing that the one which is homeomeric with the phenomenon. But let's end this discussion here.

I wish to discuss a few points of detail against those who think that it is by spirit of rivalry, when one names a substance, that those who use these words act; and also against those who, when a certain disposition of style has been made necessary, launch sophistical arguments on the basis of these questions. For they say that those who change their minds... [40: p. 63 Leone: (29.28)] ... [is proper] to him who has bound into a set of mutually consonant and consequent materials, who has mixed with doctrines which are not proper to it such and such a correct doctrine, even if he happens to have attacked it before. Indeed, a compiler is not someone who assembles a doctrine scattered at random with other doctrines foreign to himself, but someone who juxtaposes mutually incompatible doctrines, whether they come from himself or from others. And if someone says something intelligent that comes from Empedocles, but happens to add something unintelligent...

[41: p. 63 Leone: (29.29)]. For it is not the case that [the sage] suddenly praises someone, and then goes on to praise someone else who holds the opposite opinion to that of the first, nor that

he praises some particular thing said by someone, and goes on to praise the opposite of that opinion, as stated by someone else. But, when he praises the kind of correct conclusion reached by so-and-so, and goes on to praise that of someone else, what he is praising is not the opposite of the conclusion of the first, but any conclusion consonant with it. And that's how he behaves in any case: first, as I said, he doesn't even think it's fair to opine on some [statements] of those: wherefore he does not cite the poets, sophists, and orators who lack [the understanding of] any [reasoning] whose conclusion is correct.

[42 p. 64 Leone: (29.30)] ... [compilers] who utter clamours in the form of enthymemes²³ and apophthegms²⁴. And of someone who fails to put together anything of consequence, [one can justly say] that he is committing complete doctrinal solecism [DB - see note below]; and, similarly, the one who for his part has undertaken to proceed by following another: a single guide for a single subject! But this is not the case with someone who does not pledge himself entirely to adopt the thesis of such and such, but only imitates it up to a certain point [lac. 1 line] and restores clean... [43: p.64 Leone: (29.31)] For it is fair to say that they are committing a solecism or that, by compiling a correct form of conclusion, they precisely ruin the chance part of their own nature [French: ils ruinent précisément la part de hasard de leur propre nature]. As for those to whom the common usage, due both to reason and to chance, of a name or an undifferentiated expression no longer allows them to perceive the difference, let them be absolutely silent! [παντελῶ[ς] ἡσυχίαν [ἐ]χέτωσαν]

[Final title: p. 64 Leone]

Epicurus

On Nature

Book XIV

3,800 Stiques***

written under the archonship of Clearchus****

***The stique is a line of hexametric type, serving as a conventional unit of length, and containing between 34 and 36 letters. The total for Book XIV would therefore be about 136,800 letters, or just over 20,000 words.

****Either 301/300 BCE

Per Merriam Webster:

solecism

1: an ungrammatical combination of words in a sentence

also : a minor blunder in speech

2: something deviating from the proper, normal, or accepted order

3: a breach of etiquette or decorum

Did you know?

The city of Soloi had a reputation for bad grammar. Located in Cilicia, an ancient coastal nation in Asia Minor, it was populated by Athenian colonists called soloikoi (literally "inhabitants of Soloi"). According to historians, the colonists of Soloi allowed their native Athenian Greek to be corrupted and started using words incorrectly. As a result, soloikos gained a new meaning: "speaking incorrectly." The Greeks used that sense as the basis of soloikismos, meaning "an ungrammatical combination of words." That root, in turn, gave rise to the Latin soloecismus, the direct ancestor of the English word solecism. Nowadays, solecism can refer to social blunders as well as sloppy syntax.

Post by "Cassius" of January 24, 2025 at 6:17 AM

Here is one - if anyone wants to recommend another, please do. I've vetted this one only for being understandable for the first several minutes in English:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKm8YV3WdiU>

Here are introductions, but I like Bryan's suggestion to listen to the original:

[Plato's Timaeus \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)

[Timaeus \(dialogue\) - Wikipedia](#)

Post by "Bryan" of January 24, 2025 at 7:33 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

3,800 Stiques***

Ἐπικούρου Περὶ Φύσεως ΙΔ, XXXΓΗΗΗΗ ἐπὶ Κλ[εάρ]χο·

I do not understand how XXXΓΗΗΗΗ is 3,800.

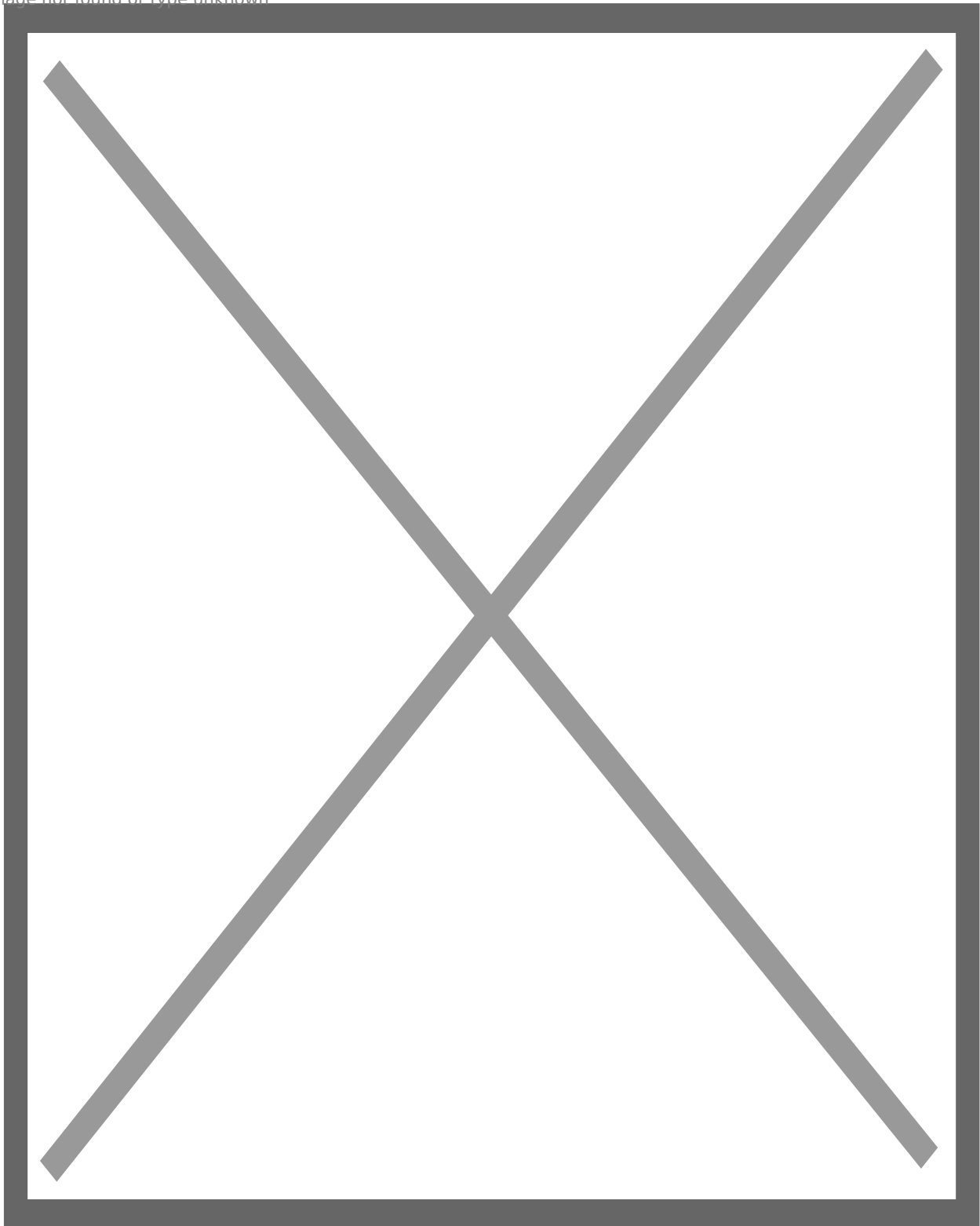
I know in some systems, X = 600, so does XXX = 1800?

Ἐ[π]ικούρου Περὶ Φύσεως ἸΕ XXXHH ἐπὶ [Ἡ]γεμάχο^υ

While, for book 15, we have: XXXHH, which is apparently 3,200 lines?

Post by “Don” of January 24, 2025 at 9:04 PM

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[Attic numerals - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org)
en.wikipedia.org

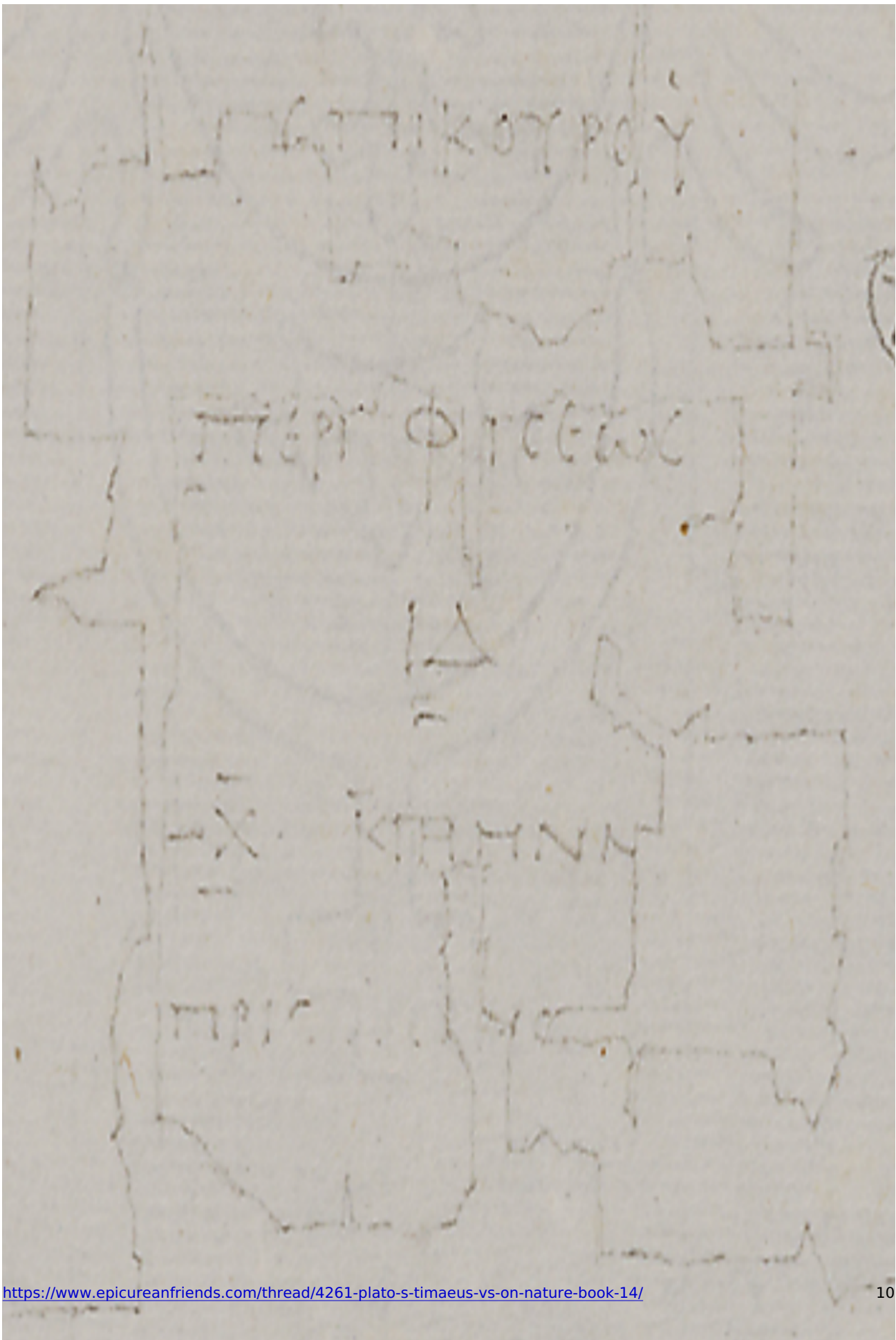
XXXΓΗΗΗΗ

XXX = 3,000

HHH	HHHH	Γ	ΓH	ΓHH	ΓHHH	ΓHHHH
300	400	500	600	700	800	900

But from that, it looks like it should be 3,900.

Although I don't know how they even got any number...



ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΟΥ

ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΣΕΩΣ

Δ

Χ ΚΡΑΝΝ

ΠΡΙΣ

Post by "Bryan" of January 24, 2025 at 10:28 PM

Thank you. Yes, that gets us much closer!

HHH	HHHH	Γ	ΓH	ΓHH	ΓHHH	ΓHHHH
300	400	500	600	700	800	900

So the Attic numeric system used for the number of lines (where $\Delta=10$, $H=100$, $\Gamma=500$, $X=1000$) is different from "Greek" system used for the book numbers (where $\Gamma=3$, $\Delta=4$, $H=8$, $X=600$), presumably because the number of lines was a much larger number. But the system used for the book numbers could accommodate the high line numbers as well. It seems a bit odd to use two systems right next to each other.

Ancient	Byzantine	Modern	Value	Ancient	Byzantine	Modern	Value	Ancient	Byzantine	Modern	Value
A	ᾶ	A'	1	Ι	ἰ	I'	10	Ρ	ῥ	P'	100
B	ῃ	B'	2	Κ	῀	K'	20	Σ	σ	Σ'	200
Γ	ῃ	Γ'	3	Λ	῀	Λ'	30	Τ	τ	T'	300
Δ	ῃ	Δ'	4	Μ	῀	M'	40	Υ	῀	Υ'	400
E	ῃ	E'	5	Ν	῀	N'	50	Φ	φ	Φ'	500
Ζ	ζ and ς	Ζ'	6	Ξ	ξ	Ξ'	60	Χ	χ	Χ'	600
Ζ	ζ and ς	ΣΤ'									

Post by “Bryan” of January 27, 2025 at 10:13 PM

After Critias' fun story of proto-Athens defeating Atlantis' eastern advancement, Timaeus sets up the distinction between **(1) what always is**, vs. **(2) what is always becoming**. He says the craftsman looked to **(1) what always is** as a model to form our single kosmos, which is in the realm of **(2) what is always becoming**. Only the realm of **(1) what always is** has any certainty, and therefore when discussing our Earthly realm of **(2) what is always becoming**, we need to be content with probabilities.

For Epíkouros the closest we have to a realm of **(1) what always is**, is the whole natures (ὅλαι φύσεις) of the atoms and the void, and the realm of **(2) always becoming** corresponds somewhat with compounds and their emergent qualities.

Epíkouros agrees with Plato in the way that he speaks with certainty about **(1) what always is**, and also agrees that we must be content with not having complete certainty about **(2) what is always becoming**, i.e., all the movements and interactions of all compounds (as it highlighted in his Letter to Pythocles).

Later on Plato includes a third aspect, the (3) Receptacle / Neutral Base. From this angle we have:

- (1) What always is, after which all is molded, ("father")
- (2) What always becomes, our realm of sensation, ("offspring")
- (3) The receptacle, or what everything comes to be in, ("mother")

Plato says the receptacle "is modified, shaped and reshaped by the things that enter it," and he compares it to a neutral base perfumers use.

Post by "Cassius" of January 28, 2025 at 6:22 AM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

For Epíkouros the closest we have to a realm of (1) what always is, is the whole natures (ὅλαι φύσεις) of the atoms and the void,

Bryan it seems like lately I came across in Lucretius a list of three things with unchanging natures, and the list was atoms, void, and something to the effect of "the universe as a whole." It struck me at the time that that would be an important cite to remember so of course I've forgotten it, but I will see if I can find it.

Not that it's necessarily super important, but it seems to go with your observation.

UPDATE: I think this is what I was remembering:

Lucretius Book 3 around 806 (Bailey) (I added the 1, 2, and 3)

Moreover, if ever things abide for everlasting, it must needs be either that, (1) because they are of solid body, they beat back assaults, nor suffer anything to come within them which might unloose the close-locked parts within, such as are the bodies of matter whose nature we have

declared before; or (2) that they are able to continue throughout all time, because they are exempt from blows, as is the void, which abides untouched, nor suffers a whit from assault; or (3) else because there is no supply of room all around, into which, as it were, things might part asunder and be broken up—even as the sum of sums is eternal—nor is there any room without into which they may scatter, nor are there bodies which might fall upon them and break them up with stout blow.

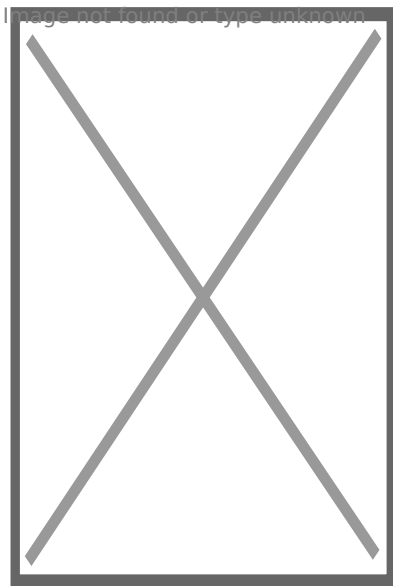
Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2025 at 7:37 AM

Also Bryan thanks for posting that reminder of the purpose of the thread.

I agree it's very important for everyone (and not just for purposes of our book review) to have a working knowledge of the basic assertions of Timaeus.

This is the source (or part of the source) of the story of Atlantis, so it's interesting for lots of reasons.

A first start would be an outline of the basic topics covered in it. Jowett's introduction is far too long to serve as a general introduction to tell us what to expect is relevant to Epicurus. Anyone have a topical outline of the subjects? We need to develop one from an Epicurean perspective.



[Timaeus](#)

www.gutenberg.org

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2025 at 7:42 AM

Bryan also the quote that starts off the basic assertion of your post is:

Quote

First then, in my judgment, we must make a distinction and ask, What is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and never is? That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state; but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is.

(that gutenber page does not have line numbers so I need a better source.

Hard to find a more clear statement than that to the effect that what the senses present to us is not real at all! It never really "is."

Whereas to Epicurus it is exactly the reverse, that which we cannot sense is *nothing* to us.

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2025 at 7:43 AM

Anyone want to suggest an edition that is both readable and has line numbers?

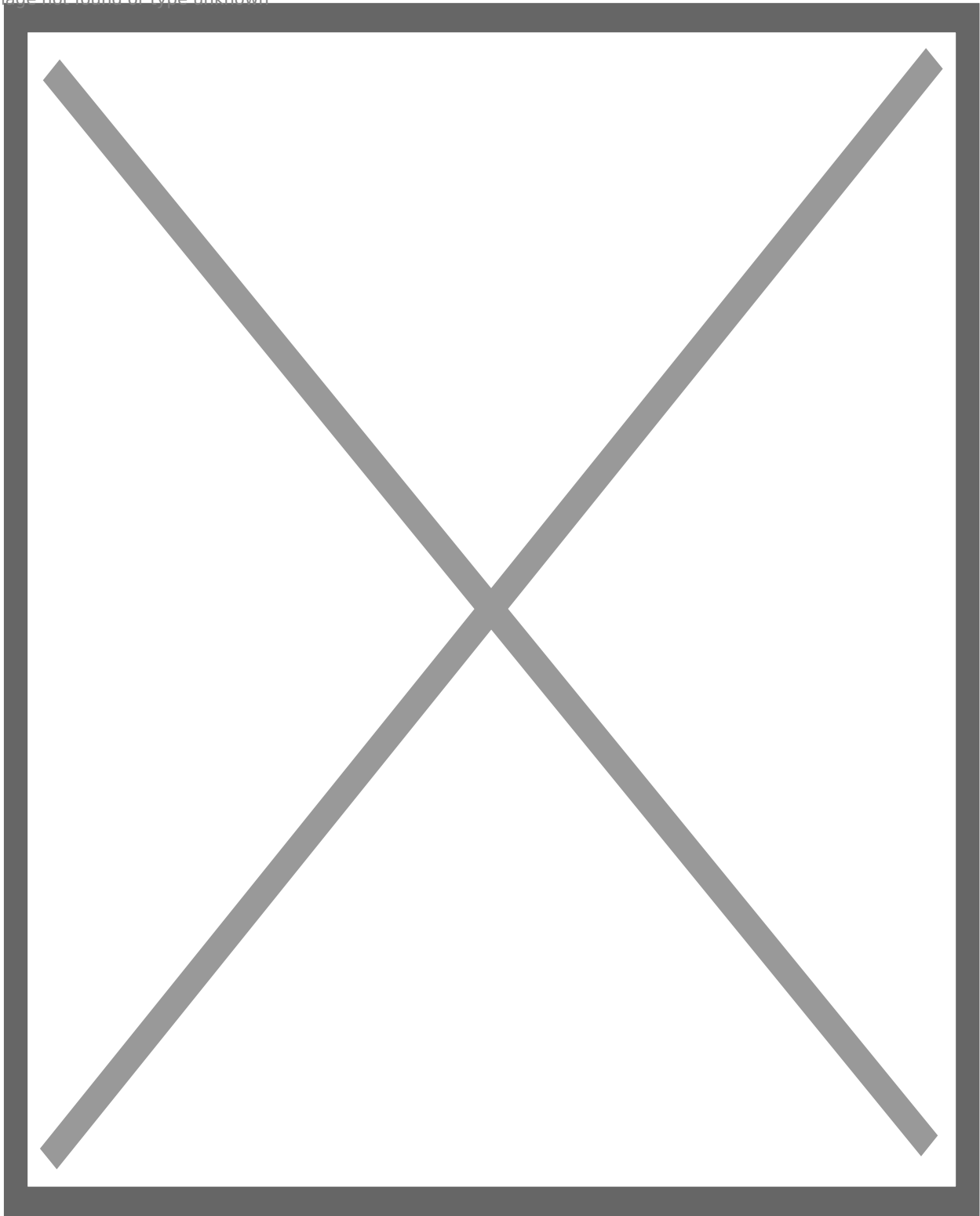
Post by “Don” of January 28, 2025 at 8:22 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

This is the source (or part of the source) of the story of Atlantis, so it's interesting for lots of reasons.

Just for the record, there was no physical place called Atlantis. It is entirely a literary invention of Plato to make a philosophical point.

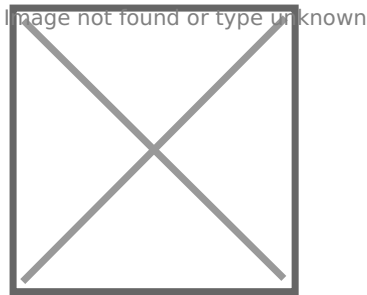
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[Atlantis - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org)
en.wikipedia.org

While some leave open the idea that Plato may have been *inspired* by accounts of the eruption of Thera or other events, the "myth of Atlantis" is just that - a myth.

The podcast *Let's Talk About Myths, Baby!* did an excellent series on Atlantis:



[Atlantis — Let's Talk About Myths, Baby!](#)

www.mythsbaby.com

Post by “Bryan” of January 28, 2025 at 10:17 AM

The inclusion of **all void and all space** as something everlasting makes sense and is consistent with Epikouros, who says that only the (1) void and (2) atoms are whole, unchanging, natures. The Whole is everlasting, but always changing.

10.40 "But if a location did not exist, which we call 'void,' 'space,' and 'intangible nature' - bodies would not have anywhere to be, or [anything] through which they move: just as they are seen moving, beyond these, nothing at all is able to be conceived (either comprehensibly or analogously to the comprehensible) as being apprehended according to whole natures, and not as what are called the 'symptoms' or 'properties' of these."

Post by “Bryan” of January 28, 2025 at 10:17 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Anyone want to suggest an edition that is both readable and has line numbers?

This is readable and has line numbers. The pages are a little thin, but they do hold up to writing and highlighting: [Link](#)

The section you underlined is 27d/28a.

Post by “Cassius” of January 28, 2025 at 10:43 AM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

The inclusion of all void and all space as something everlasting makes sense and is consistent with Epikouros, who says that only the (1) void and (2) atoms are whole, unchanging, natures. The Whole is everlasting, but always changing.

The addition of the "change" factor to "eternally the same" is an interesting thing to think about.

Does change in "location" constitute change? If so, atoms are constantly moving, and in that sense, void is constantly relocating.

So atoms and even may move or at least change location, but does the fact that something moves constitute always being in a state of "becoming?"

The whole approach of thinking that something is not real unless it is totally unchanging in every respect smacks of being bogus and the ultimate problem. However before you can be sure the approach is bogus you have to understand what is being asserted.

Sounds like Diogenes of Oinoanda was on exactly the right track:

Quote

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 “Cassius” of January 28, 2025 at 10:44 AM

I want to pursue Atlantis further, but that would divert this thread so I'll split that off 😊

So let's take up Atlantis here:

Post

[Was Atlantis An Allegorical Flight of Fancy Like Plato's Cave And His Ideal Forms?](#)

CASSIUS ADMIN NOTE: I am splitting this off from another thread ([link here](#)) so as not to divert that one. My main interest at the moment is to trace back in outline form the question of what the Epicureans and/or other ancients might have thought about this question, given the importance of the Timaeus in Greek ideas about world history and the nature of the world as a whole. Don's links may answer that question already but I think the topic is worthy of being clear so we can relate that aspect...



Don

January 28, 2025 at 8:22 AM

Post by “Bryan” of January 29, 2025 at 1:22 AM

It is well known that the spirits of men who lived a good life go on to live in the star that God made for them, but if a man does not live a good life, his spirit will be reincarnated as a woman (42c) -- but it is less well known that spirits persisting in not living the good life (*i.e.*, *not understanding the geometry behind the motions of the stars*), but instead are stupid enough to trust their senses, will come back as *birds* (91e):

"As for birds... they descended from innocent but simple minded men, men who studied the heavenly bodies but in their naivete believed that the most reliable proofs concerning them could be based upon visual observation."

So I guess that is our future.

Post by "Bryan" of January 29, 2025 at 1:30 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If so, atoms are constantly moving, and in that sense, void is constantly relocating

I would not think that the void can relocate. Void can in no way be altered. In fact, that malleability is what makes Plato's receptacle so different from the void:

"This all takes place at once, like the rotation of a wheel, because there is no such thing as a void." (79c)

"There is no void, these things push themselves around into each other, all things move by exchanging places." (80c)

Plato is very clear that the "**(3) The receptacle, or what everything comes to be in**" is not void, because void does not exist.

"There is no void into which anything that is moving could enter" (79b)

Post by "Bryan" of January 29, 2025 at 1:53 AM

Within **(2) What always becomes, our realm of sensation**, Plato says it is most probable that everything is made out of *triangles*. This is at the basis of his geometry that Epíkouros attacks, but it is the basis for some other absurd ideas: triangles in your stomach and blood breakdown food, this becomes less efficient as you get older -- because your triangles are getting increasingly more dull (81c), this is, in fact, exactly what aging is.

The elements are built from and can be broken back down into triangles. If it seems to you that triangles alone might not be sufficient as a basis for everything we see in the world -- you have not considered that these triangles have different angles and come in different sizes (57d).

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2025 at 6:51 AM

This is great stuff Bryan - keep it coming!

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2025 at 6:54 AM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

This is readable and has line numbers. The pages are a little thin, but they do hold up to writing and highlighting: [Link](#)

I didn't click on this link immediately so i didn't realize it was to a printed version.

I guess in addition to that we need a link to something public domain at Archive.org in PDF - presumably a Jowett translation (?) - that has line numbers and potentially annotations. An older Loeb edition?

A quick search of Archive.org has not been productive. It looks to me that for best word-searching ability we need a single PDF containing all of Jowett's edition of Plato's dialogues, which was apparently in seven volumes, with the last version being a third edition. It's well over a hundred years old so should be freely available.

Strangely there does not seem to be a free older Loeb edition -- possibly because the Jowett pre-dated that and was considered the gold standard (?)

I also see a Thomas Taylor edition but I don't know the reputation of that.

Further notes:

Archive.org seems to be damaged from its problems last year. The older Jowett editions which ought to be public domain are not downloadable easily, which chatgpt points to this edition which is [much newer](#).

I will check Hathitrust - not productive.

It appears that the Online Librery of Liberty has the full Jowett Series.

[Timaeus volume is here.](#)

[This appears to be a master link](#) from which the full set can be assembled.

Post by “Don” of January 29, 2025 at 7:16 AM

Would Perseus' Lamb translation be helpful?

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...80%3atext%3dTim.>

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2025 at 7:50 AM

It sure would but Don that link doesn't work for me.

I like Perseus for a lot of reasons but I also like having my own standard PDF for security reasons. It bothers me that the full Jowett available more easily on Archive.org. I thought it was in the past (?) Also, the text in the old editions is often annotated in creative ways. Actually I don't know what Jowett's reputation really is. I recall my college professor sort of joking about him as the authority but I don't know if that's true or not, or if Jowett has a reputation for being unjustifiably opinionated.

I do see that Jowett's editions have very very long introductory summaries which might be useful in themselves, especially for word searching.

Benjamin Jowett (1817–1893) is one of the most well-known translators of Plato into English. His translations, first published in the late 19th century, were widely influential and helped popularize Plato's works among English-speaking audiences. However, his reputation as a translator is mixed.

Chatgpt:

Strengths of Jowett's Translation:

1. **Elegance and Readability:** Jowett's translations are often praised for their literary quality. He sought to render Plato's dialogues in smooth, flowing English that was accessible to a broad readership.

2. **Influence on Classical Studies:** His work played a crucial role in shaping the study of Plato in the English-speaking world. Many generations of students and scholars first encountered Plato through Jowett's translations.
3. **Extensive Commentary:** Jowett's introductions and notes provided valuable philosophical and historical context, making his editions useful for both students and general readers.

Criticisms of Jowett's Translation:

1. **Paraphrasing and Interpretation:** Jowett often paraphrased rather than strictly translating Plato's Greek. He sometimes imposed his own interpretations, which may not always align with the original text.
2. **Moral and Victorian Bias:** His translations reflect the moral and intellectual climate of Victorian England. Some scholars argue that he sanitized or altered certain passages to conform to 19th-century sensibilities, particularly regarding issues like sexuality and religion.
3. **Lack of Precision:** Compared to more modern translations, Jowett's work can be imprecise, particularly in capturing the nuances of Plato's philosophical arguments.

Modern Alternatives:

While Jowett's translations remain influential and readable, many scholars prefer more recent translations that strive for greater accuracy and fidelity to the Greek text. Translations by scholars such as Thomas G. West, G. M. A. Grube, C. D. C. Reeve, and John M. Cooper (who edited *Plato: Complete Works*) are often recommended for academic study.

In summary, Jowett's translations are valuable for their literary quality and historical significance, but they should be read with awareness of their interpretative nature and potential biases.

Post by "Don" of January 29, 2025 at 8:02 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

It sure would but Don that link doesn't work for me.

Let's try again...

[Plato, Timaeus, section 17a](#)

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2025 at 8:04 AM

Yep that works, and this link takes you to the English

[Plato, Timaeus, section 17a](#)

Post by “Bryan” of January 29, 2025 at 2:01 PM

I wanted to highlight this section:

"God began by first marking them out into shapes by means of forms and numbers. And that God constructed them, so far as He could, to be as fair and good as possible, whereas they had been otherwise,—this above all else must always be postulated in our account. Now, however, it is the disposition and origin [53c] of each of these Kinds which I must endeavor to explain to you in an exposition of an unusual type; yet, inasmuch as you have some acquaintance with the technical method which I must necessarily employ in my exposition, you will follow me.

[53c fin.] In the first place, then, it is plain I presume to everyone that fire and earth and water and air are solid bodies; and the form of a body, in every case, possesses depth also. Further, it is absolutely necessary that depth should be bounded by a plane surface; and the rectilinear plane is composed of triangles. [53d] Now all triangles derive their origin from two triangles, each having one angle right and the others acute; and the one of these triangles has on each side half a right angle marked off by equal sides, while the other has the right angle divided into unequal parts by unequal sides. These we lay down as the principles of fire and all the other bodies, proceeding according to a method in which the probable is combined with the necessary; but the principles which are still higher than these are known only to God and the man who is dear to God."

Post by “Cassius” of January 29, 2025 at 2:12 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

I wanted to highlight this section:

"God began by first marking them out into shapes by means of forms and numbers.

As to posts like this one I don't think the reaction icons do justice. Maybe the thank you is best so that's what I will use but I do think enthusiastically that all these issues need to be drawn out!

Post by "Bryan" of February 5, 2025 at 3:31 PM

I think that part of Plato's argument is that the simplest possible plane is a triangle: therefore, this shape is properly considered the most basic building block for extending into three-dimensional space. Before we go 3D, Plato starts with a 30-60-90 triangle and -- from *six* of those -- and builds an equilateral triangle.

[54d] "In the next place we have to explain the form in which each Kind has come to exist and the numbers from which it is compounded. First will come that form which is primary and has the smallest components, and the element thereof is that triangle which has its hypotenuse twice as long as its lesser side. And when a pair of such triangles are joined along the line of the hypotenuse, and this is done thrice, by drawing the hypotenuses [54e] and the short sides together as to a center, there is produced from those triangles, six in number, one equilateral triangle."

Post by "Bryan" of February 5, 2025 at 3:44 PM

Plato takes four of these groupings of six to form the tetrahedron:

"And when four equilateral triangles are combined so that three plane angles [55a] meet in a point, they form one solid angle, which comes next in order to the most obtuse of the plane angles. And when four such angles are produced, the first solid figure is constructed, which divides the whole of the circumscribed sphere into equal and similar parts."

Post by "Bryan" of February 5, 2025 at 4:04 PM

Plato takes 120 of the 30-60-90 triangles to form the icosahedron (twenty of these groupings of six):

"[55b] And the third solid is composed of twice sixty of the elemental triangles conjoined, and of twelve solid angles, each contained by five plane equilateral triangles, and it has, by its production, twenty equilateral triangular bases."

Post by "Bryan" of February 24, 2025 at 6:41 PM

In support of Timaeus being the views of Plato himself, we also have Diogenes Laertius, "His [i.e., Plato's] own views are expounded by four persons, Socrates, Timaeus, the Athenian Stranger, the Eleatic Stranger.... for, even when Socrates and Timaeus are the speakers, it is Plato's doctrines that are laid down." (3.52)