

General View vs Detailed Exposition of Natural Physics

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 18, 2025 at 8:26 AM

I've been thinking about how the following quote from Herodotus was said with regard to Epicurean natural physics -- but not with regard to ethics.

So each of the Epicurean natural physics principals could be summed up in one phrase (or short sentence)-- and which DeWitt gathered from Lucretius into the 12 principals.

Here is the quote I am referring to.

"For we have frequent need of the general view, but not so often of the detailed exposition. 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. And in fact the accurate knowledge of details will be fully discovered if the general principles in the various departments are thoroughly grasped and borne in mind; for even in the case of one fully initiated the most essential feature in all accurate knowledge is the capacity to make a rapid use of observation and mental apprehension, and this can be done if everything is summed up in elementary principles and formulae. For it is not possible for anyone to abbreviate the complete course through the whole system, if he cannot embrace in his own mind by means of short formulae all that might be set out with accuracy in detail."

I am wondering if this isn't possible to do for Epicurean ethics because of word usage such as "pleasure" "gods" etc. -- so therefore it would be difficult to boil down much of the ethics to single short phrases -- and the attempt to do so has likely been the origin of incorrect interpretations (such incorrect interpretations as ataraxia being more important than eudaimonia) -- one error in reasoning causes incorrect conclusions.

Perhaps one way to deal with this could be similar to how in our time we have legal documents which often have a long list of word definitions given before the main part of the legal explanation.

Also to consider how the physical world is different than the mental world -- you can point to physical objects and observe their behavior -- but you can't physically point to internal states of pleasure and pain since they are internal and subjective.

I'm starting a separate thread regarding the idea of defining and summarizing Epicurean ethics [over here](#).

Post by “Cassius” of December 18, 2025 at 8:42 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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Post by “Kalosyni” of December 18, 2025 at 8:46 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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That could be good for the natural physics principals.

But I am thinking that would not work for ethics, because defining words could require several long sentences. [I started a new thread to discuss development of a new list of Epicurean ethics \(click to go to that thread\).](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 18, 2025 at 9:20 AM

Here is an excerpt from an old post regarding DeWitt's 12 point summary:

Quote

1. Matter is uncreatable. << Meaning that at NO point did any supernatural force create the universe. The universe operates by natural principles, and by natural principles alone.

2. Matter is indestructible. << Meaning that the universe as a whole is always going to be here, and it isn't going to mutate into "heaven" at the whim of any god. And nothing other than matter IS indestructible. There is no realm of "ideal forms" of which what we see around us is a poor reflection. What we see is what we get.

3. The universe consists of solid bodies and void. << Meaning that there is no supernatural spirit, no divine fire, no First Cause, no Prime Mover - just elemental matter that operates according to its own properties.

4. Solid bodies are either compounds or simple. << Meaning that what we see around us is a combination of elemental matter and void, and that the properties of what we see derive from those combinations, and not from the whim either of a supernatural god or some whim that we ourselves wish to see. Nature is king, queen, and all that there is.

5. The multitude of atoms is infinite. << Meaning that we here on Earth don't sit here at the center of the universe with everything revolving around us, and God nodding approvingly on the "outside." There is no "outside" the universe.

6. The void is infinite in extent. << Meaning that just as there is no limit to matter there is no limit to the void. The universe is limitless in extent and the Earth is not some playground of the gods.

7. The atoms are always in motion. << Meaning that change is the only constant, and that only a fool who ignores nature would think that he or she can come to rest in the arms of God or in "heaven," or be punished in "hell." So long as we live motion is constant around us and in us, and it is up to us to manage our lives according to Nature; after that our consciousness comes to an end along with the other qualities of the atoms which combined to become our bodies and minds.

8. The speed of atomic motion is uniform. << Meaning that at the level of the ultimate essence of the universe everything is moving according to its own properties, whether we can see and observe it or not.

9. Motion is linear in space, vibratory in compounds. << Meaning again that regardless of what we can see with our eyes, at the atomic level motion is constant even in those combinations of matter that appear to us to be at rest.

10. Atoms are capable of swerving slightly at any point in space or time. << Meaning that our minds are not billiard balls where all our decisions and actions have been predetermined with mathematical precision and no alteration from the beginning of time, which the Determinists and the followers of Fate would have us believe; it is possible for human beings to have real effect on the course of their lives.

11. Atoms are characterized by three qualities: weight, shape and size. << Meaning that the atoms have properties which we can discover and on which we can rely to predict the nature of the atoms and the combinations they form, which means that we have the ability to explore nature through science and improve our lives with the knowledge we gain.

12. The number of the different shapes is not infinite, merely innumerable. << Meaning that there are limits to the properties of matter which gives rise to the combined bodies that exist in our own experience, and that as a result we can observe Nature and derive ideas about how Nature operates that will assist us in living - we are not faced with a chaotic and random universe in which no knowledge is possible, as alleged by the skeptics.

Display More

You can read the original post and thread: [over here](#).

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 18, 2025 at 9:31 AM

In last night's Zoom an interesting idea came up regarding science and our understanding of the universe...that once it is understood that everything is natural and that observation is the basis, then the principals are revealed again and again, so that though likely that some modern thinkers/scientists read Lucretius, it is also likely that they could develop their ideas without having known of Epicurus or his natural physics, simply because of clear understanding and observation of the natural world.

If anyone at last night's meeting can expain/say this better, please do [TauPhi Joshua Bryan](#)

Post by “TauPhi” of December 18, 2025 at 12:00 PM

Instead of repeating my slightly incoherent attempts to discuss this topic, I'll leave you with Ricky Gervais' quote which sums up the thing pretty neatly:

Quote

... Science is constantly proved all the time. You see, if we take something like any fiction, any holy book... and destroyed it, in a thousand years' time, that wouldn't come back just as it was. Whereas if we took every science book, and every fact, and destroyed them all, in a thousand years they'd all be back, because all the same tests would [produce] the same result.