

provisions of his will and from the fact that they joined him in philosophizing, the most notable being the aforementioned Mus; in a word, he was a friend to all mankind. His piety to the gods and love for his country were too great for words. So gentlemanly was he that he did not even participate in political life. And despite the severely troubled times then afflicting Greece, he lived out his life there, travelling through Ionia two or three times to see friends. And friends came to him from all over, and lived with him in the Garden (as Apollodorus too says); and he bought it for eighty minas.

11. Diocles says in book three of his summary that they lived very simply and frugally. "At any rate," he says, "they were content with a half-pint serving of weak wine and generally their drink was water." And that Epicurus did not think it right to put one's possessions into a common fund, as did Pythagoras who said "friends' possessions are common"; for that sort of thing is a mark of mistrust; and if there is mistrust there is no friendship. In his letters he himself says that he is content with just water and simple bread. And he says, "Send me a little pot of cheese so that I can indulge in extravagance when I wish." This was the character of the man who taught that pleasure is the goal. . . .

12. . . . According to Diocles he was most impressed by Anaxagoras among earlier philosophers, although he opposed him on some points, and by Archelaus, Socrates' teacher. He used to train his followers, [Diocles] says, even to memorize his treatises.

13. Apollodorus in his *Chronology* says that he studied under Nausiphanes and Praxiphanes. He himself denies it, and says in the letter to Eurylochus that he is self-taught. He denies that there ever was a philosopher named Leucippus, and so does Hermarchus; some, including Apollodorus the Epicurean, say that Leucippus was Democritus' teacher. Demetrius of Magnesia says that he studied under Xenocrates too. . . .

14. . . . Ariston says in his life of Epicurus that he copied the *Canon* straight out of the *Tripod* of Nausiphanes, under whom he also says he studied, in addition to Pamphilus the Platonist in Samos. And that he began to philosophize at the age of twelve and founded his school at the age of 32.

He was born, according to Apollodorus in his *Chronology*, in the third year of the 109th Olympiad, in the archonship of Sosigenes [341 B.C.] on the seventh day of the month of Gamelion, seven years after Plato's death. 15. When he was 32 he first founded a school in Mytilene and Lampsacus [and stayed] for five years. Then he moved to Athens and died there in the second year of the 127th Olympiad in the archonship of Pytharatus [271–270 B.C.], at the age of 72. Hermarchus, son of Agemortus, of Mytilene, took over the school.

He died of kidney stones, as Hermarchus too says in his letters, after an illness of fourteen days. At that point, as Hermippus also says, he got into a bronze bathtub filled with warm water, asked for unmixed wine, and tossed it back. 16. He then bade his friends to remember his teachings and died thus.

The Extant Letters

The following three letters are preserved because Diogenes Laertius included them in his biography. They are the most important surviving evidence for the philosophy of Epicurus. The *Letter to Herodotus* (I-2) is a summary of physical doctrine; the *Letter to Menoeceus* (I-4) is an even briefer summary of ethics; the authenticity of the summary of meteorology in I-3 (*Letter to Pythocles*) has been questioned, but we regard it as probably genuine.

Letter to Herodotus: Diogenes Laertius [I-2] 10.34–83

34. Epicurus to Herodotus, greetings:

35. For the sake of those, Herodotus, who are unable to work out with precision each and every detail of what we have written on nature and who lack the ability to work through the longer books I have composed, I have myself prepared an adequate summary of the entire system, to facilitate the firm memorization of the most general doctrines, in order that at each and every opportunity they may be able to help themselves in the most important issues, to the degree that they retain their grasp on the study of nature. Even those well advanced in the examination of the universe must recall the outline of the entire system; and this outline is structured according to basic principles. For we frequently need the overall application [of the intellect], but not so often the detailed application.

36. We must, then, approach those [general points] continually, and get into our memory an amount [of doctrine] sufficient to permit the most vital application [of the intellect] to the facts; moreover, complete precision on detailed points will be discovered if the general outlines are comprehensively grasped and remembered. For even the fully expert [student of physics] gets as the most vital benefit of complete precision the ability to make nimble use of his applications, and (this would happen if every point) were united in [a set of] simple principles and maxims. For it is not possible to know the concentrated result of our continuous

overview of the universe unless one can have in oneself a comprehensive grasp by means of brief maxims of all that might also be worked out in detail with precision.

37. Since this kind of method is useful to *all* those who are concerned with the study of nature, I recommend constant activity in the study of nature; and with this sort of activity more than any other I bring calm to my life. That is why I have composed for you this type of summary statement of the basic principles of the entire set of doctrines.

First, Herodotus, we need to have grasped what is denoted by our words, [1] so that by referring to what they denote we can make decisions about the objects of opinion, investigation, or puzzlement and [2] so that all of these things will not remain undecided, [as they would] if we tried to give an infinitely long demonstration, and [3] so that our words will not be empty. 38. For it is necessary that we look to the primary conception corresponding to each word and that it stand in no need of demonstration, if, that is, we are going to have something to which we can refer the object of search or puzzlement and opinion. Again, it is also necessary to observe all things in accordance with one's sense-perceptions, i.e., simply according to the present applications, whether of the intellect or of any other of the criteria, and similarly [to observe everything] in accordance with our actual feelings, so that we can have some sign by which we may make inferences both about what awaits confirmation and about the non-evident.

After distinguishing these points we must next arrive at a general view about the things which are non-evident. The first point is that nothing comes into being from what is not; for [in that case] everything would be coming into being from everything, with no need of seeds. 39. And if that which disappears were destroyed into what is not, all things would have been destroyed, since that into which they were dissolved does not exist. Further, the totality [of things] has always been just like it is now and always will be. For there is nothing for it to change into. For there exists nothing in addition to the totality, which could enter into it and produce the change.

Moreover,¹ the totality is [made up of] (bodies and void); for in all cases sense-perception itself testifies that bodies exist, and it is by sense-perception that we must infer by reasoning what is non-evident, as I already said. 40. And if there did not exist that which we call void and space and intangible nature, bodies would not have any place to be in or move through, as they obviously do move. Beyond these two things

1. A scholiast in antiquity added: "He makes this point in the *Major Summary* at the beginning and in book one of the *On Nature*."

[viz. bodies and void] nothing can be conceived, either by a comprehensive grasp or analogously to things so grasped, [at least not if we mean] grasped as complete natures rather than as what are termed properties or accidents of these [two] things.

Further, among² bodies, some are compounds, and some are those things from which compounds have been made. 41. And these are atomic and unchangeable, if indeed they are not all going to be destroyed into not being but will remain firmly during the dissolutions of compounds, being full by nature and not being subject to dissolution in any way or fashion. Consequently the principles of bodies must be atomic natures.

Moreover, the totality is unlimited. For what is limited has an extreme; but an extreme is seen in contrast to something else, so that since it has no extreme it has no limit. But since it has no limit it would be unlimited and not limited.

Further, the totality is unlimited in respect of the number of bodies and the magnitude of the void. 42. For if the void were unlimited and bodies limited, bodies would not come to a standstill anywhere but would move in scattered fashion throughout the unlimited void, since they would lack anything to support them or check them by collision. But if the void were limited, the unlimited bodies would not have a place to be in.

In addition, the bodies which are atomic and full, from which compounds both come to be and into which they are dissolved, are ungraspable when it comes to the differences among their shapes. For it is not possible that so many differences [in things] should come to be from the same shapes having been comprehensively grasped. And for each type of shape there is, quite simply, an unlimited number of similar [atoms], but with respect to the differences they are not quite simply unlimited but only ungraspable.

43.³ And the atoms move continuously⁴ for all time, some recoiling far apart from one another [upon collision], and others, by contrast, maintaining a [constant] vibration when they are locked into a compound or enclosed by the surrounding [atoms of a compound]. 44. This is the result of the nature of the void which separates each of them and is not

2. The scholiast adds: "This is also in book one of the *On Nature* and in books fourteen and fifteen, as well as in the *Major Summary*."

3. Scholiast: "A bit later he also says that division does not go on indefinitely; and he says since the qualities change, unless one intends simply to extend them indefinitely with respect to their magnitudes too." This scholion is probably corrupt, and the sense is unclear.

4. Scholiast: "and he says a bit later that they also move with equal speed since the void gives an equal yielding [i.e., lack of resistance] to the lightest and to the heaviest."

able to provide any resistance; and their actual solidity causes their rebound vibration to extend, during the collision, as far as the distance which the entanglement [of the compound] permits after the collision.

There is no principle for these [entities], since the atoms and the void are eternal.⁵ 45. If all these points are remembered, a maxim as brief as this will provide an adequate outline for [developing] our conceptions about the nature of what exists.

Moreover, there is an unlimited number of *cosmoi*, and some are similar to this one and some are dissimilar. For the atoms, which are unlimited (as was shown just now), are also carried away to very remote distances. For atoms of the sort from which a world might come to be or by which it might be made are not exhausted [in the production] of one world or any finite number of them, neither worlds like this one nor worlds unlike them. Consequently, there is no obstacle to the unlimitedness of worlds.

46. Further, there exist outlines [i.e., images, *eidola*] which are similar in shape to solids, only much finer than observed objects. For it is not impossible for such compounds to come into being in the surrounding environment, nor that there should be favourable opportunities for the production of hollow and thin [films], nor that effluences should retain the relative position and standing [i.e., order] that they had in the solid objects. These outlines we call 'images'. Further, since their movement through the void occurs with no conflict from [atoms which] could resist them, it can cover any comprehensively graspable distance in an inconceivably [short] time. For the presence and absence of resistance take on a similarity to slowness and speed.

47. The moving body itself, however, cannot reach several places at the same time, speaking in terms of time contemplated by reason; for that is unthinkable. Yet when considered as arriving in perceptible time from any point at all in the unlimited, it will not be departing from the place from which we comprehensively grasp its motion as having come from. For it will be like resistance even if to this point we leave the speed of the movement free from resistance. The retention of this basic principle too is useful.

Next, none of the appearances testifies against [the theory] that the images have an unsurpassed fineness; and that is why they have unsurpassed speed too, since they find every passage suitably sized for there

5. Scholiast: "He says a bit later that there are not even any qualities in atoms, except shape and size and weight; in the *Twelve Basic Principles* he says that their colour changes according to the arrangement of the atoms; and that they cannot have every magnitude—at any rate an atom has never been seen with sense-perception."

being no or few [bodies] to resist their flow, whereas there is some [body] to resist a large or infinite number of atoms.

48. In addition, [none of the facts testifies against the claim] that the production of images occurs as fast as thought. For there is a continuous flow from the surface of bodies, though it is not obvious from any reduction in bulk because the [objects are] refilled [by other atoms]; [and this flow] preserves for quite some time the position and order of the atoms which it had in the solid, even if it is sometimes disrupted; and [two-dimensional] compounds are quickly produced in the surrounding environment, since they do not need to be filled out with depth—and there are certain other ways in which such natures [i.e., compound images] can be produced. None of these [claims] is testified against by the senses, providing one considers the clear facts in a certain way; one will also refer to [the senses] the [fact that] harmonious sets [of qualities] come to us from external objects.

49. One must also believe that it is when something from the external objects enters into us that we see and think about their shapes. For external objects would not stamp into us the nature of their own colour and shape via the air which is between us and them, nor via the rays or any kind of flows which move from us to them, as well as [they would] by means of certain outlines which share the colour and shape of the objects and enter into us from them, entering the vision or the intellect according to the size and fit [of the effluences] and moving very quickly; 50. then, for this reason, they give the presentation of a single, continuous thing, and preserve the harmonious set [of qualities] generated by the external object, as a result of the coordinate impact from that object [on us], which [in turn] originates in the vibration of the atoms deep inside the solid object. And whatever presentation we receive by a form of application, whether by the intellect or by the sense organs, and whether of a shape or of accidents, this *is* the shape of the solid object, produced by the continuous compacting or residue of the image. Falsehood or error *always* resides in the added opinion (in the case of something which awaits) testimony for or against it but in the event receives neither supporting testimony (nor opposing testimony).⁶

51. For the similarity of appearances (which are like what are grasped in a representational picture and occur either in dreams or in some other applications of the intellect or the other criteria) to what are called real and true things would never occur if some such thing were not added [to the basic experience]. And error would not occur if we did not have

6. Scholiast: "According to a certain motion in ourselves which is linked to the application to presentations but is distinct, according to which falsehood occurs."

some other motion too in ourselves which is linked (to the application to presentations) but is distinct; falsehood occurs because of this, if it is not testified for or is testified against; but if it is testified for or is not testified against, truth occurs.

52. One must, then, keep this doctrine too quite firmly in mind, in order to avoid destroying the criteria of clear facts and to avoid having error placed on an equal basis with that which has been established, which would confound everything.

Moreover, hearing too occurs when a flow moves from that object which makes an utterance or produces a sound or makes a noise or in any other way causes the auditory experience. This flow is broken into small masses which are homogeneous with the whole which at the same time preserve an harmonious set [of qualities] relative to each other and also a unique kind of unity which extends back to the originating source and, usually, produces the perceptual experience occasioned by the flow; and if not, it only makes the external object apparent. 53. For without some harmonious set [of qualities] coming from there, this sort of perceptual experience could not occur. So one must not think that the air itself is shaped by the emitted voice or even by things of like character—for it is far from being the case that it [i.e., air] is affected in this way by that [i.e., voice]—but rather when we emit voice the blow which occurs inside us precipitates the expulsion of certain masses which produce a flow similar to breath, and which causes in us the auditory experience.

Further, one must also believe that the [sense of] smell, like hearing too, would never have produced any experience if there were not certain masses moving from the object and being commensurate for the stimulation of this sense organ, some of them of one sort, i.e., disturbing and uncongenial, and some of another, i.e., non-disturbing and congenial [to the organ of smell].

54. Further, one must believe that the atoms bring with them none of the qualities of things which appear except shape, weight, and size and the [properties] which necessarily accompany shape. For every quality changes, while the atoms do not change in any respect; for it is necessary that during the dissolution of compounds something should remain solid and undissolved, which will guarantee that the changes are not into what is not nor from what is not, but come about by rearrangements in many cases, and in some cases too by additions and subtractions [of atoms from the compound]. That is why it is necessary that the things which are rearranged should be indestructible and not have the nature of what changes, but rather their own masses and configurations. For it is also necessary that these things should remain [unchanged].

55. For even with things in our experience which change their shapes

by the removal [of matter], the shape is grasped as inhering in the object which changes, while its qualities do not so inhere. The shape remains, but the qualities are eliminated from the entire body. So these features which are left behind [after a change] are sufficient to produce the differences in compounds, since it is necessary that some things be left behind and that there not be a destruction into what is not.

Moreover, one should not believe that atoms have every [possible] magnitude, so that one may avoid being testified against by the appearances. But one should believe that there are some differences in magnitude. For if this [doctrine] is added, then it will be easier to account for what, according to our feelings and sense-perceptions, actually happens. 56. But [to suppose] that every magnitude exists is not useful for [accounting for] the differences of qualities, and at the same time it would be necessary that some atoms reach the point of being visible to us—which is not seen to occur nor can one conceive how an atom could become visible.

In addition to these points, one must not believe that there can be an unlimited number of masses—no matter how small—in any finite body. Consequently, not only must one eliminate unlimited division into smaller pieces (to avoid making everything weak and being forced in our comprehensive grasps of compound things to exhaust the things which exist by reducing them to non-existence), but one must also not believe that within finite bodies there is an unlimited movement, not even by smaller and smaller stages.

57. For as soon as one says that there is in some thing an unlimited number of masses, no matter how small, then one cannot think how this magnitude could any longer be limited. For obviously these unlimited masses must be of some size or other; and no matter how small they might be, the magnitude [of the whole object] would for all that be unlimited. And since the limited has an extreme which can be distinguished even if it cannot be observed on its own, it is impossible not to conceive that the thing next to it is of the same character and that by moving forward from one point to the next in this fashion it turns out that one will in this fashion reach the unlimited conceptually.

58. And we must conceive that the minimal perceptible [part] is neither such as to be traversible nor is it totally and altogether unlike this. It has something in common with things which permit of being traversed, but [unlike them] it does not permit the distinguishing of parts [within it]; but whenever, because of the resemblance created by what they have in common, we think that we are going to distinguish some [part] of it—one part here, another over there—it must be that we encounter something of equal size. We observe these one after another, starting from the first, and not [as being] in the same place nor as touching each other's

parts with their own, but rather we [see] them measuring out magnitudes in their own unique way, more of them measuring out a larger magnitude and fewer of them a smaller.

One must believe that the minimal part in the atom also stands in this relation. 59. It is obvious that it is only in its smallness that it differs from what is observed in the case of perception, but it does stand in the same relation. For indeed it is because of this relation that we have already asserted that the atom has magnitude, and have merely extended it far beyond [perceptible things] in smallness. And again we must believe that the minimal and indivisible parts are limits which provide for themselves as primary [units] a standard of measurement for the lengths of larger and smaller [atoms], when we contemplate invisible things with reason. For what they have in common with things which do not permit of movement [across themselves] is enough to get us this far; but it is not possible for these [minimal parts] to possess motion and so move together [into compounds].

60. Further, one must not assert that the unlimited has an up and a down in the sense of an [absolutely] highest and lowest point. We know, however, that what is over our heads from wherever we stand, or what is below any point which we think of—it being possible to project both indefinitely—will never appear to us as being at the same time and in the same respect both up and down. For it is impossible to conceive of this. Consequently, it is possible to grasp as one motion the one conceived of as indefinitely [extended] upwards and the one conceived of as indefinitely [extended] downwards, even if a thousand times over a thing moving from us towards the places over our heads should arrive at the feet of those above us or a thing moving from us downwards should arrive at the head of those below us.

61. Furthermore, it is necessary that the atoms move at equal speed, when they move through the void and nothing resists them. For heavy things will not move faster than small and light ones, *when*, that is, nothing stands in their way; nor do small things move faster than large ones, since they all have a passage commensurate to them, when, that is, nothing resists these atoms either; nor is upward [movement] faster; neither is the sideways [movement] produced by collisions faster; nor is the downward [movement] caused by their own weight faster either. For as long as either ⟨of them⟩ prevails, the motion will continue as fast as thought, until it meets with resistance, either from an external source or from its own weight counteracting the force of a colliding body.

62. Moreover, with respect to compounds, some will move faster than others, though the atoms [by themselves] move at equal speed, because the atoms in aggregates are moving towards one place [i.e., in the same

direction] in the shortest continuous time, even if they do not do so in the [units of] time which reason can contemplate; but they frequently collide, until the continuity of the motion becomes perceptible. For the added opinion concerning the invisible—i.e., that the [units of] time which reason can contemplate will allow for continuous motion—is not true in such cases. For everything that is observed or grasped by the intellect in an [act of] application is true.

63. Next, one must see, by making reference to our sense-perceptions and feelings (for these will provide the most secure conviction), that the soul is a body [made up of] fine parts distributed throughout the entire aggregate, and most closely resembling breath with a certain admixture of heat, in one way resembling breath and in another resembling heat. There is also the ⟨third⟩ part which is much finer than even these [components] and because of this is more closely in harmony with the rest of the aggregate too. All of this is revealed by the abilities of the soul, its feelings, its ease of motion, its thought processes, and the things whose removal leads to our death.

Further, one must hold firmly that the soul is most responsible for sense-perception. 64. But [the soul] would not have acquired this [power] if it were not somehow enclosed by the rest of the aggregate. But the rest of the aggregate, though it provides for the soul this cause [of sense-perception], itself has a share in this property because of the soul; still it does not share in all the features [of sense-perception] which the soul has. That is why, when the soul has departed, it does not have sense-perception. For it could not have acquired this power all by itself, but something else which came into being with it provided body [with this power]; and this other thing, through the power actualized in itself by its motion, immediately produced for itself a property of sense-perception and then gave it (because of their close proximity and harmonious relationship) to the body too, as I said.

65. That is why the soul, as long as it is in [the body], will never lack sense-perception even if some other part has departed; but no matter what [parts] of it are destroyed along with the container's dissolution (whether entire or partial), *if* the soul survives it will be able to perceive. But the rest of the aggregate—whole or part—is not able to perceive even if it survives, when the number of atoms, however small it be, which makes up the nature of the soul, has departed.

Furthermore, when the entire aggregate is destroyed, the soul is scattered and no longer has the same powers, nor can it move; consequently, it does not then [in fact] have [the power of] sense-perception. 66. For it is not possible to conceive of it as perceiving if it is not in this complex and not executing these movements, [i.e.,] when the containing and

surrounding [parts] are not such as now contain it and make possible these motions.⁷

67. Moreover, one must also think of this, that we apply the term 'incorporeal', in the most common meaning of the term, to what could be conceived of as independently existing. But the incorporeal cannot be thought of as independently existing, except for the void. And the void can neither act nor be acted upon but merely provides [the possibility of] motion through itself for bodies. Consequently, those who say that the soul is incorporeal are speaking to no point. For if it were of that character, it could neither act nor be acted upon at all. But in fact both of these properties are clearly distinguished as belonging to the soul.

68. So, if one refers all of these calculations concerning the soul to the feelings and sense-perceptions, and remembers what was said at the outset, one will see the points comprehended in the outline with sufficient clarity to be able to work out the details from this basis with precision and certainty.

Further, the shapes and colours and sizes and weights and all the other things which are predicated of body as accidents, either of all [bodies] or of visible ones, and are known by sense-perception itself, these things must not be thought of as independent natures (for that is inconceivable).

69. Nor [must it be thought] that they are altogether non-existent, nor that they are distinct incorporeal entities inhering in [the body], nor that they are parts of it. But [one should think] that the whole body throughout derives its own permanent nature from all of these [properties]—though not in such a way as to be a compound [of them], just as when a larger aggregate is produced from the masses themselves, whether the primary ones or magnitudes smaller than the whole object in question—but only, as I say, deriving its own permanent nature from all of these. But all of these [are known by] their own peculiar forms of application and comprehension, always in close accompaniment with the aggregate and in no way separated from it, which is given the predicate 'body' by reference to the aggregate conception.

70. Further, it often happens that some impermanent properties, which are neither invisible nor incorporeal, accompany bodies. Consequently,

7. Scholion: "Elsewhere he says that it is also composed of very smooth and very round atoms, differing quite a bit from those of fire. And that part of it is irrational, and is distributed throughout the rest of the body, while the rational part is in the chest, as is evident from [feelings of] fear and joy. And that sleep occurs when the parts of the soul which are distributed through the whole compound are fixed in place or spread apart and then collide because of the impacts. And semen comes from the entire body."

using this term in the commonest sense, we make it clear that the[se] properties neither have the nature of an entire thing, which we call a body when we grasp it in aggregate, nor the nature of the permanent accompaniments without which it is not possible to conceive of a body. They would all be referred to according to certain applications of the aggregate which accompanies [them]—71. but [only] when they are observed to inhere [in bodies], since the properties are not *permanent* accompaniments [of those bodies]. And we should not eliminate this clear evidence from what exists just because [the properties] do not have the nature of an entire thing which happens to be what we also call a body, nor the nature of the permanent accompaniments; but neither are they to be regarded as independent entities, since this is not conceivable either in their case or in the case of permanent accidents; but one must think that they are all, just as they appear [to be], properties somehow (related to) the bodies and not permanent accompaniments nor things which have the status of an independent nature. But they are observed just as sense-perception itself presents their peculiar traits.

72. Moreover, one must also think of this very carefully: one should not investigate time as we do the other things which we investigate in an object, [i.e.,] by referring to the basic grasps which are observed within ourselves, but we must reason [on the basis of] the clear experience according to which we utter [the phrases] "for a long time" or "for a short time" interpreting it in a manner closely connected [to our experience]. Nor must we alter the terms we use in order to 'improve' them, but we must apply the current terms to [time]; nor must one predicate anything else of it, as though it had the same substance as this peculiar thing—for there are people who do this. But the best policy is to reason solely by means of that which we associate with this peculiar thing and by which we measure it. 73. For this needs no demonstration, but [only] reasoning, because we associate it with days and nights and their parts, and similarly with the feelings too and with the absence of them, and with motions and states of rest, again, having in mind in connection with them precisely and only this peculiar property according to which we apply the term "time."⁸

On top of what has been said, one must believe that the cosmoi, and every finite compound which is similar in form to those which are frequently seen, have come into being from the unlimited, all these things having been separated off from particular conglomerations [of matter], both larger and smaller; and that they are all dissolved again, some more

8. Scholias: "He also says this in book two of the *On Nature* and in the *Major Summary*."

quickly and some more slowly, and some undergoing this because of one kind of cause, some because of others.⁹

74. Again, one must not believe that the cosmoi necessarily have one kind of shape. . . .¹⁰ For no one could demonstrate that a cosmos of one sort would not have included the sort of seeds from which animals, plants, and the rest of the observable things are formed as compounds, or that a [cosmos of a] different sort *could* not have [included the same things].¹¹

75. Further, one must suppose that [human] nature was taught a large number of different lessons just by the facts themselves, and compelled [by them]; and that reasoning later made more precise what was handed over to it [by nature] and made additional discoveries—more quickly among some peoples, and more slowly among others and in some periods of time (making greater advances) and in others smaller ones.

Hence, names too did not originally come into being by convention, but the very natures of men, which undergo particular feelings and receive particular presentations according to the tribes they live in, expelled air in particular ways as determined by each of their feelings and presentations, in accordance too with the various local differences among their tribes. 76. And later [the names] were established by a general convention in each tribe, in order that their meanings might be less ambiguous for each other and might be expressed more succinctly. And those who were aware of certain previously unobserved things introduced them [to their tribes] and with them handed over certain words [for the things], some being forced to utter them, others choosing them by reasoning, following the commonest [mode of causation],¹² and communicated [their meaning] in this fashion.

Moreover, when it comes to meteorological phenomena, one must believe that movements, turnings, eclipses, risings, settings, and related phenomena occur without any [god] helping out and ordaining or being about to ordain [things] and at the same time having complete blessedness

9. Scholiast: "It is clear, then, that he says that the cosmoi are destructible, [this happening] when the parts undergo change. And elsewhere he says that the earth is supported by the air."

10. There is a lacuna at this point in the text. A scholiast adds: "But he himself says in book 12 of the *On Nature* that they are different: some are spherical, some egg-shaped, and others have different sorts of shapes; but they do not have every [possible] shape. Nor are they animals separated off from the unlimited."

11. Scholiast: "Similarly they are nourished in it. One must believe that it happens in the same way on earth too."

12. The text may be corrupt here; the sense should be that the inventors or discoverers followed an analogy with words already used in their own societies when deliberately coining new terms.

and indestructibility; 77. for troubles and concerns and anger and gratitude are not consistent with blessedness, but these things involve weakness and fear and dependence on one's neighbours. Nor again can they be in possession of blessedness if they [the heavenly bodies] are at the same time balls of fire and adopt these movements by deliberate choice; rather, we must preserve the complete solemnity implied in all the terms applied to such conceptions, so that we do not generate from these terms opinions inconsistent with their solemnity; otherwise, the inconsistency itself will produce the greatest disturbance in our souls. Hence, one must hold the opinion that it is owing to the original inclusion of these compounds in the generation of the cosmos that this regularly recurring cycle too is produced.

78. Moreover, one must believe that it is the job of physics to work out precisely the cause of the most important things, and that blessedness lies in this part of meteorological knowledge and in knowing what the natures are which are observed in these meteorological phenomena, and all matters related to precision on this topic.

And again, [one must accept] that in such matters there is no room for things occurring in several ways and things which might occur otherwise, but that anything which suggests conflict or disturbance simply cannot occur in the indestructible and divine nature. And it is possible to grasp with the intellect that this is unqualifiedly so.

79. And what falls within the ambit of investigation into settings and risings and turnings, and eclipses and matters related to these, makes no further contribution to the blessedness which comes from knowledge; but people who know about these things, if they are ignorant of what the natures [in question] are and what the most important causes are, have fears just the same as if they did not have this special knowledge—and perhaps even more fears, since the wonderment which comes from the prior consideration of these phenomena cannot discover a resolution or the orderly management of the most important factors.

That is why even if we discover several causes for turnings and settings and risings and eclipses and things of this sort (as was also the case in [the investigation] of detailed occurrences) 80. we must not believe that our study of these matters has failed to achieve a degree of accuracy which contributes to our undisturbed and blessed state. Consequently, we should account for the causes of meteorological phenomena and everything which is non-evident, observing in how many different ways similar phenomena occur in our experience; and [we should] disdain those who fail to recognize what exists or comes to be in a single manner and what occurs in many different ways, because they overlook the [fact that the] presentation [comes] from great distances and are, moreover, ignorant

of the circumstances in which one cannot achieve freedom from disturbance and those, similarly, in which one can achieve freedom from disturbance. So if we think that [a phenomenon] might also occur in some particular way and recognize the very fact that it [might] happen in many different ways, we shall be as free from disturbance as if we *knew* that it occurred in some particular way.

81. In addition to all these points in general, one must also conceive that the worst disturbance occurs in human souls [1] because of the opinion that these things [the heavenly phenomena] are blessed and indestructible and that they have wishes and undertake actions and exert causality in a manner inconsistent with those attributes, and [2] because of the eternal expectation and suspicion that something dreadful [might happen] such as the myths tell about, or [3] even because they fear that very lack of sense-perception which occurs in death, as though it were relevant to them, and [4] because they are not in this state as a result of their opinions but because of some irrational condition; hence, not setting a limit on their dread, they suffer a disturbance equal to or even greater than what they would suffer if they actually held these opinions. 82. And freedom from disturbance is a release from all of this and involves a continuous recollection of the general and most important points [of the system].

Hence, one must attend to one's present feelings and sense-perceptions, to the common sense-perceptions for common properties and to the individual sense-perceptions for individual properties, and to every immediately clear fact as revealed by each of the criteria. For, if we attend to these things, we will give a correct and complete causal account of the source of our disturbance and fear, and [so] dissolve them, by accounting for the causes of meteorological and other phenomena which we are constantly exposed to and which terrify other men most severely.

Here, Herodotus, in summary form are the most important points about the nature of the universe; 83. consequently, I think that this account, if mastered with precision, would be able to make a man incomparably stronger than other men, even if he does not go on to all of the precise details of individual doctrines. For he will also be able to clarify, by his own efforts, many of the precise details of individual doctrines in our entire system, and these points themselves, when lodged in memory, will be a constant aid.

For [these doctrines] are such that even those who have already worked out the details of individual doctrines sufficiently well or even completely, can, by analysing them into [intellectual] applications of this sort, acquire most of the [elements of the] survey of nature as a whole. But those who are not among the completely accomplished [students of nature] can, on

the basis of these points and following the method which does not involve verbal expression, with the speed of thought achieve an overview of the doctrines most important for [achieving] tranquillity.

Letter to Pythocles: Diogenes Laertius [I-3]
10.83-116

83. Epicurus to Pythocles, greetings:

84. Cleon delivered to me your letter, in which you continued to display a good will to us worthy of our concern for you and tried, not unconvincingly, to recall the lines of reasoning which contribute to a blessed life; and you requested that I send you a brief and concise [statement of our] reasoning concerning meteorological phenomena in order to facilitate your recollections. For our other writings on the topic are hard to recall, even though, as you said, you have them constantly in hand. We were pleased to receive this request from you and were seized by pleasant expectations. 85. Therefore, having written all the rest, we shall produce what you requested, since these lines of reasoning will be useful to many others too, and especially to those who have just begun to sample true physics and those who are entangled in preoccupations more profound than some of the general studies. So grasp them well and, holding them keenly in your memory, survey them in conjunction with the rest [of my summary of physics], which I sent to Herodotus as the Smaller Summary.

First of all, do not believe that there is any other goal to be achieved by the knowledge of meteorological phenomena, whether they are discussed in conjunction with [physics in general] or on their own, than freedom from disturbance and a secure conviction, just as with the rest [of physics]. 86. [Our aim is] neither to achieve the impossible, even by force, nor to maintain a theory which is in all respects similar either to our discussions on the ways of life or to our clarifications of other questions in physics, such as the thesis that the totality [of things] consists of bodies and intangible nature, and that the elements are atomic, and all such things as are consistent with the phenomena in only one way. This is not the case with meteorological phenomena, but rather these phenomena admit of several different explanations for their coming to be and several different accounts of their existence which are consistent with our sense-perceptions.

For we should not do physics by following groundless postulates and stipulations, but in the manner called for by the phenomena; 87. for our life does not now need irrationality and groundless opinion, but rather for us to live without tumult. And everything happens smoothly and