

Phil. 401: Discussion Questions

Atomism and Corpuscularanism

February 9th, 2017

Readings:

- Epicurus. "Letter to Herodotus." In B. Inwood and L. P. Gerson, eds. *Hellenistic philosophy: Introductory readings*. Hackett Publishing, 1997. Pages 5-19.
- R. Boyle. "The Grounds for and Excellence of the Corpuscular or Mechanical Philosophy". In: ed. by J. Bennett. 2015

Aristotle on Explanation

1. According to Aristotle, what elements composed all earthly objects?
2. Aristotle hypothesized that each of the earthly elements exhibited pairs of properties. Each element was either dry or wet, and it was hot or cold. Conjecture which elements had which properties.
3. Using your answers to the above questions, conjecture how Aristotle might have explained:
 - (a) Why human blood is generally warmer than skin
 - (b) Why water evaporates
 - (c) Why objects are different colors
 - (d) Why flowers smell

The Mechanical Philosophy

1. Review your answer to question four from last night's reading assignment (i.e., according to Epicurus, what properties do atoms have?). According to Boyle, when can men "easily understand one another's meaning?" Compare your answers to these two questions.
2. In light of your answers to the last question, discuss how Boyle might explain each of the four phenomena in question three above (i.e., why water evaporates, etc.)

3. Compare and contrast your Aristotelian explanations with your Boylean explanations.
4. Review your answer to question one and eight from last night's reading assignment. Then discuss question twelve, which recall was the following:
 - Boyle rejects the claim that, to accept a scientific hypothesis, one must be able to prove it or falsify its main rival. What does Boyle propose instead as sufficient grounds for accepting a hypothesis?
5. In light of your answer to the previous question, compare and contrast Epicurus' reasons for endorsing atomism with Boyle's.