

24.200: Ancient Philosophy
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Ancient and Hellenistic Philosophers

Epicureanism is one example of a philosophical "school" which flourished in the Hellenistic Age (323-31bc), ie., from the death of Alexander to the victory of Octavian (aka Augustus) over Mark Antony at the battle of Actium. (Roman Empire established by Augustus in 30bc.) It will help to get a broad sketch of the philosophical community of Athens, to place Epicurus within it.

Socrates (469-399bc)

Plato's Academy

*Plato (427-347bc)

*Speusippus () successor of Plato

*Xenocrates () successor of Speusippus

Polemo () successor of Xenocrates

Crates of Athens () successor of Polemo

Arcesilaus (315-241bc) "middle academy", successor of Crates

Sacydes () successor of Arcesilaus

Carneades of Cyrene (213-129bc) "new academy" (academic skepticism)

Clitomachus (head of "new academy" from 128-110bc)

Philo of Larisa (c. 148-77bc)

Proclus (410-485ad) last head of academy

Other notable academics

Antiochus (b. c.130bc) -largely stoic?

Cicero (106-43bc) -largely stoic?

Plutarch (46-120ad)

Aristotle's Lyceum

Peripatetics

Aristotle (389-322bc)

Theophrastus (370-288/5bc)

Strato d. 269b

Andronicus of Rhodes (1st century BC)

Aristocles (1st century AD)

Skeptics

Pyrrho of Elis (~365-275bc)

Timon of Phlius (~320-230bc)

Ariston?

Aenesidemus (greek, uncertain date, Sextus used as basis for work)

Sextus Empiricus (2nd century AD)

Stoics

Zeno of Citium (335-263bc)

Cleanthes of Assos (331-232bc) successor of Zeno

Chrysippus of Stoli (~280-207bc) successor of Cleanthes

Diogenes of Babylon (d. ~152bc) -successor of Chrysippus

Antipater of Tarsus -successor of Diogenes

Panaetius of Rhodes (c. 185-109bc) -successor of Antipater

Other notable stoics

Apollodorus of Seleucia (late 2nd century bc)

Posidonius (c. 135-50bc) (of Apamea) set up school in Rhodes

Seneca (~5bc-65ad)

Marcus Aurelius (121-180ad)

Cato the Younger

Epictetus (~55-135ad)

Epicureans

Epicurus (341-271bc)

Hermarchus -successor to Epicurus

Polystratus -successor to Hermarchus (mid 3rd century BC)

Lucretius (early 1st century AD c. 94-55bc)

Philodemus (110-40bc)

Demetrius of Laconia (c. 100bc)

Diogenes of Oenoanda

Metrodorus of Lampsacus (c. 331-278)

Megarians

Euclides of Megara (c. 450-380bc)

Stilpo (late 4th and early 3rd cent)

Diodorus Cronus (~300bc)

Philo the Dilectician (aka Philo of Megara) pupil of Diodorus Cr.

Cynics

Diogenes the Cynic (of Sinope) (d. ~324?)

Crates the Cynic (of Thebes) late 4th and early 3rd cent bc.

Monimus (4th century bc)

Neo-Platonists

Plotinus (204-270ad)

Porphyry (3rd century AD)

Simplicius (6th century AD) commentator on Aristotle

Eclectics

Philo of Alexandria (c. 25bc-50ad) -Jewish and Greek synthesizer?

Commentators, etc.

Alexander of Aphrodisias (end of 2nd c. AD)

Diogenes Laertius (3rd century AD)
Galen (129-200ad)

After Plato's death, Aristotle left Athens for 12 years, returning to Athens in 335. Probably this is the time during which he did most of his biological work. When he returned he taught not in the Academy, but in the Lyceum, a grove just outside of the civic boundaries of Athens. After Aristotle's death in 322, Theophrastus established the Lyceum as a school and carried on Aristotle's teaching.

- i) Hellenistic philosophy aimed to make itself available to a wider group than Plato and Aristotle's teaching.
- ii) Ethical values became removed from social status and nationality, rejecting traditional attitudes; individual well-being could be achieved by one's inner resources; human rationality could provide the basis for a tranquil and happy life. Emphasis on search for happy, tranquil life. Some commentators link this to increasing instability in Greek world, others to a sense of the breakdown of small community life...
- iii) Scope of Hellenistic philosophy narrower; special sciences, history, literature, geography, etc. separated off...mostly moved to Alexandria.

II. Epicurus

Epicurus set up a community near Plato's academy. It was more like a monastery than like a school, -- individuals committed to a certain form of life; women and slaves were admitted. Called "the garden". He wrote over 300 rolls (books), 37 of them included in the work "On Nature". Very little is left, virtually all of it is in the text. Much of our knowledge of Epicurus's views gained through Lucretius who lived and wrote 200 years later. Lucretius's life and character are virtually unknown to us.

2 concerns Fear of
and fear of
divine

action/intervention were two
major obstacles to leading a tranquil and happy life. These fears should be combatted by understanding of the real causes of things. If we understand accurately our place in the world, such fears will dissolve.

Epistemology empiricist, ie., the senses and immediate feeling are the foundation for all knowledge.

Metaphysics materialist/atomist, ie., ultimately the world consists of atoms and the void.

Ethics hedonist, ie., pleasure is the only thing which is good as an end.

Contrast with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle

Socrates

skeptical about knowledge, no metaphysics, ethics divorced from pleasure?

the senses provide no knowledge; what is real is not material -- only the forms are real; pleasure is not intrinsically good.

Aristotle

the senses work together with nous; what is real is a composite of matter and form; pleasure accompanies virtue and happiness which are the supreme good.

Common ground ethical objectivism; supreme good/virtue grounded in human nature, ie., what we are, and what leads to our flourishing. Also, with P and A non-skeptical -- knowledge of reality is possible.

III. Epistemology

A. Relevant quotes

Lucretius, p. 39-40 "If a belief resting directly on this foundation [of the senses] is not valid, then there will be no standard to which we can refer any doubt on obscure questions for rational confirmation."

Epicurus, letter to Herodotus 38b "We must use our sensations as the foundation of all our investigations; that is, we must base investigations on the mental apprehensions, upon the purposeful use of the several senses that furnish us with knowledge, and upon our immediate feelings. In these ways we can form judgements on those matters that can be confirmed by the senses and also on those beyond their reach."

Also

Epicurus Letter to Herodotus 80 "We must search for the causes of celestial phenomena and in general of that which cannot be clearly perceived by first finding in how many ways similar phenomena are produced within the range of our senses; and we must pay no heed to those who, in the case of phenomena that can only be seen from a distance, fail to distinguish between that which is and remains single and that which may happen in many different ways, and who do not know under what conditions it is possible and under what conditions impossible to achieve peace of mind. If we know this, that phenomena may take place in many ways, we shall be as little disturbed if we merely think it possible that a particular phenomenon happens in some particular way as we would be if we knew this as an absolute fact." (See also 81-82a)

Letter to Pythocles 85d-87 "Do not think that knowledge about the things above the earth, whether treated as part of a philosophical system or by itself, has any purpose other than peace of mind and confidence. This is

also true of the other studies. Do not attempt the impossible, and do not expect to conduct investigations in all fields in the way in which we have discussed ethics or found solutions to other physical problems (for instance, the composition of the universe from matter and void, or the indivisibility of the first elements) or of all problems that have single explanations in agreement with the visible evidence. For the case is different with the things above the earth. Each of these phenomena has more than one cause for its creation and more than one account of its nature, all of them in harmony with the evidence of the senses...If one is satisfied...with that which is known to be probable, no difficulty arises in connection with those things that admit of more than one explanation in harmony with the evidence of the senses."

--seems to suggest that atomism is the only (fundamental) explanation of the phenomena of the senses, though there may be various ways that we can form atomistic explanations of natural phenomena?

B. Sense experience

i) Sensations do not lie, and are not in contradiction

We begin with sense impressions which give us information about the world. How can we be confident in our sense impressions? Why should we be confident? How do we distinguish reliable from unreliable impressions?

Our senses cannot deceive us about the impression itself. The impression is caused by an "effluence" given off by an object; this is a cluster of atoms or "idol". "Provided that these 'effluences' enter the sense organ without experiencing any change of structure, the impression they produce in us will be an accurate image of the object. If, on the other hand, their structure is disrupted in transit, the effluences will cause us to sense something which corresponds not to some actual characteristic of the object itself..." (long, p. 22) We distinguish those which are reliable by their clarity or vividness (Letter to Herodotus 52a "we must do our best to hold opinion in check in order that we may neither destroy the criteria of judgement which depend on the clear view...")

Before we gain knowledge, we must classify our sense impressions under concepts. "Conceptions" are general concepts or mental pictures produced by repeated sense impressions which are clear and similar in kind. They persist after sensation ceases and record our experience of the world. Language is a method of signifying those conceptions.

There are also 'images' which bypass the sense organs and penetrate directly into the mind. These too are atomic clusters, but their density is much finer than the effluences which affect our senses. They account for dream-images, visions of the dead, etc. Some of them are simply chance' combinations of individual atoms, others are real effluences of things not

sensed. "Real" sense impressions are formed by a steady stream of atoms.

C. Analogy

How can we reconcile the empiricism with the belief in atoms and the void? --Argument by analogy or similarity? Need more than consistency with empirical phenomena...need to base the explanation on ordinary perceived processes?

IV. Metaphysics

Atoms and the void

- i) There are bodies/atoms which
 - a) are indestructible, and solid
 - b) are in constant motion, not wholly determined (swerve)
 - c) are infinite in number, but finite in kind
 - d) possess weight, bulk, mass, but not color, smell, etc.
 - e) combine to make up macroscopic things.
- ii) there is a void between atoms, required by the fact of motion (and divisibility?).

Principles used to support atomism

- i) Nothing comes from nothing (any change is in something underlying)
- ii) Nothing passes away into nothing
- iii) The universe as a whole is in a stable condition.

These principles are thought to be confirmed in experience, and atomism is thought to be the only explanation of this.

Re indivisibility

Suppose every body were porous, then it would contain empty space. But what bounds empty space? Solid. Nothing can contain within itself empty space unless it contains within itself something solid. The atom consists of minimal parts which are divisible in thought, but actual divisibility requires empty space along which the division is accomplished.