

Following death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., Aristotle fled Athens; he died the following year. But with the demise of democracy, Athens ceased to be the political & scientific center. Greek philosophy continued to flourish in Athens, but it did take a new turn with the est. of 4 schools of thought: (in addition to the existing schools, Plato's Academy, which was shut down by Emperor Justinian in AD 529, & Aristotle's Lyceum: Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, & Neo-Platonism. We will first explore Epicureanism which was founded by Epicurus (342-271 B.C.). He founded the Garden where they lived a communal life, dedicated to the principles laid down by Epicurus himself. *The De Reum Natura (On the Nature of Things)* is the most revealing source of Epicurean doctrine. Epicurean thinking reached its peak through Pierre Gassendi, who wrote three works on Epicurus, which were read by Hobbes, Locke, & Newton.

EPISTEMOLOGY:

A. Sensations are criteria of truth: They combined an atomistic materialism & empiricism with a set of ethical principles designed to liberate people from Mythos.

1. Knowledge is based on sense perception; sensation is criterion of truth for it enables us to distinguish true views concerning the world from false views. Why? Sense perception is our only access to the world. Upshot is the reason itself is founded on senses; you don't have to doubt senses, but don't confuse perception with fallible interpretation. As long as one doesn't add anything to stimulus, perceptions will be reliable.

Thus, unless at least some of our sense perceptions are true, & we can tell which ones, knowledge of the world would be impossible. But knowledge of the world is possible. So, at least some of our sensations are true & we can tell which ones. But there is no way for us to distinguish true from false sensations since sensations are our only access to the world. Since knowledge requires we be able to tell which of our sensations are true, & if there were some false sensations we could not tell which were true, it follows that all our sensations are true. Sensations, that is, are the criteria of truth.

2. Doctrine of Effluences:

To explain how all our sensations are true, they appealed to the idea that sensations are caused by a sort of film of atoms which somehow flow off the object & penetrate the perceiver. For ex. They explain, for example, how a stick appears straight when out of water, but bent in water. The effluences which flow off the straight stick are disrupted by the water in reaching the perceiver. The straight effluences, then, become bent by the water.

3. Criticism:

The Doctrine of Effluences weakens Epicurean empiricism (empiricism is the view that our only or primary source of knowledge is sense perception). Sensations turn out not to be infallible evidences for the shape for the stick, for example, but rather only the shape of the affluences of the stick.

4. Response:

The Epicureans's retort by distinguishing between sensations & judgments. Sensations, being affluences, can't be wrong. Judgments, however, being of things not directly sensed (such as the stick itself), as opposed to its effluences), can be true or false. judgments compatible with & confirmed by the sensations are acceptable or justified.

5. Admission/Consequence:

There will be times when there is no way to decide between rival judgments.

METAPHYSICS:

A. Compatible with our "Sensations" is Atomism. Following Democritus, the Epicureans maintained that the world was composed of an infinite number of indivisible atoms moving in the void.

1. Everything is composed of atoms & void.

Since nothing can come from nothing, the basic constituents of the universe have always existed.

The void must exist because if all space were occupied, then solid objects would have no space to move into. All atoms move at same speed, but when they collide & deflect each other's motions, they conjoin to form a solid object. Such compound bodies have properties, which the atoms out of which they are made do not possess. Atoms have only shape, weight, and size. The human soul, according to Epicurus, is composed of physical atoms; it is finely structured & diffused throughout the whole body. The soul is born, grows, & dies with the body. The soul must be physical, because otherwise, it would be void or nothing. Since it is changed by & affects changes in physical things, it can't be immaterial.

2. Swerve Doctrine:

Unlike Democritus, who maintained that atoms move in the world in random directions, **Epicureans maintained that the atoms move in a single downward direction.** To explain the collision, collection, & separation of atoms, the argue for the "swerve." This "swerve," which affects the motion of atoms at indeterminate times and places, provides a degree of randomness to this otherwise determined world. Thus, *the "swerve" effectively eliminates ANY ROOM for Platonic & Aristotelian teleology.*

3. Everything can be explained by appeal to the purposeless, accidental, & indeterminate collection of & separation of animate atoms. The "swerve" may be thought to make room for some semblance of human free will in this otherwise fully determined mechanical world.

ETHICS:

A. Ultimately, Epicureanism is an ethical theory identify "good" as pleasure.

1. Individual Pleasure: Different from Plato & Aristotle, whereas they regard living in a community as part & parcel of the virtuous life, **Epicurus' view is individualistic: ethics is a question of individual pleasure.**

2. **But Epicurean hedonistic theory of ethics is not the gross hedonism with which Epicureanism is sometimes associated.** Simply pleasures are held to be just as valuable & easier to achieve than the most refined & cultivated pleasures (e.g., eating a grape is as valuable as eating a gourmet dinner). Moreover, many of the pleasures obtained from gratifying body often result in greater pain.

3. **Basis of a society as a social contract, & Epicurus denies that justice is a good in itself.** Said differently, people do not have a moral obligation to act justly; rather, justice is a question of obeying rules that advance the happiness of all concerned. Rules or laws that satisfy this criterion of usefulness are just, and the wise person will obey them in order to secure tranquility.

4. They also maintained that **mental anxiety is the greatest pain. Freedom from this anxiety is the greatest pleasure.** Thus, the atomistic theory serves to discredit 2 things most responsible for human anxiety: fear of death & fear of the gods. People fear death because they fear the punishment they may receive in the afterlife. But once they recognize that the soul is completely corporeal, a collection of atoms just as susceptible to decomposition as anything else, they have no reason to fear, death, & punishment. The atomistic theory assures them that neither soul nor sensation nor consciousness survives death.

5. Atomistic theory of nature assured them that **the gods can't be responsible for any natural even; they are unable to affect anything.**

God help them.