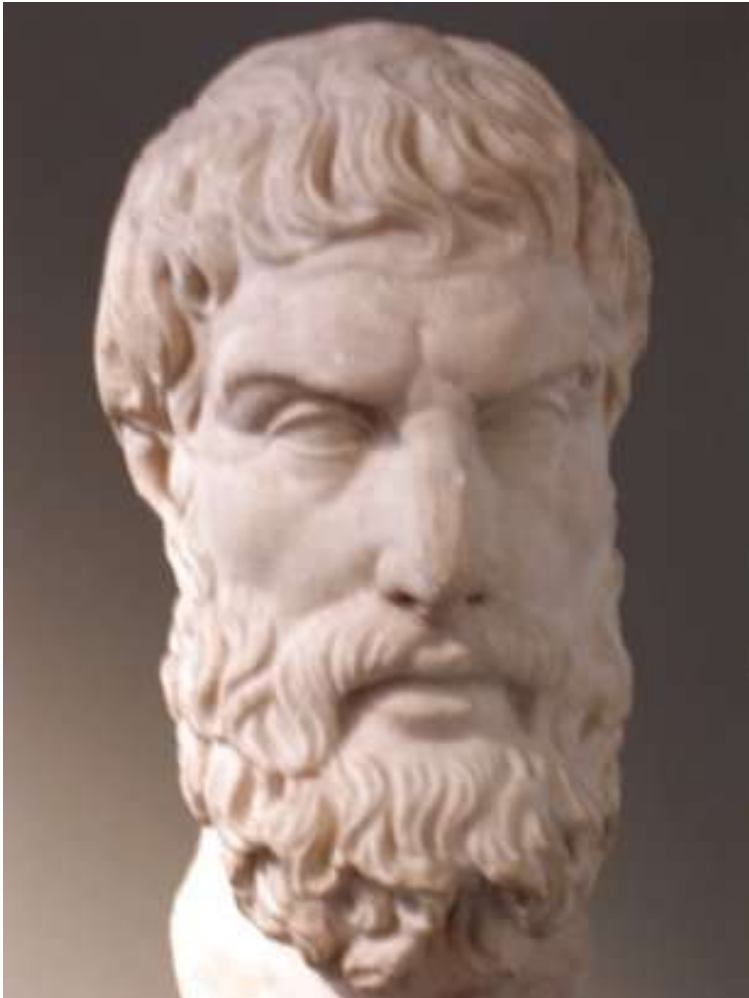




Epicureanism

Philosophy 21
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Epicurus



- Born 341 B.C.
- From the Greek island of Samos
- Established school in a garden outside Athens
- Died 270 B. C.

Epicurus's Contributions

- Adopted and modified the earlier atomism of Leucippus and Democritus
 - Epicurus's atomism was influential on scientists of the early modern period (17th and 18th centuries)
- Propounded an ethics according to which the goal of life is freedom from pain
- Secularized philosophy, claiming that the gods have no influence on cosmic or human affairs

The Legacy of Epicurus

- The doctrines of Epicurus were expounded at great length by the Roman Lucretius
- These doctrines influenced modern philosophers such as David Hume
- An Epicurean is now considered to be a person devoted to sensuous pleasure
 - “A person devoted to refined sensuous enjoyment (especially good food and drink)”-- WordNet

The Real Epicurean Life

- Epicurus and his followers lived a relatively secluded life in a garden he owned outside Athens
- They valued friendship above all other social relations
- The life-style of the Epicureans was very frugal
- Epicurus himself had a sparse diet and considered a piece of cheese an extravagance

Happiness

- If happiness is present, we have everything
- If happiness is absent, we do everything we can to get it
- So, one must practice the things that produce happiness
- The person who lives well is the happy person
- The happy person fears neither the gods nor death

The Gods

- Perhaps to avoid the charge of atheism, Epicurus stated that we have a basic grasp of the nature of the gods
- They are indestructible and blessed animals
- Nothing more may be attributed to the gods than indestructibility and blessedness
- The grasp of the gods' blessedness is what makes their conception beneficial to the good
- The false conception of the gods as like themselves leads the bad to fear them

The Life of the Gods

- Reality is infinite in extension and duration
- There are many universes with spaces between them
- These spaces are the dwelling-places of the gods
- The influence of the gods does not extend beyond the place where they dwell
- If the gods are good and influence the affairs of humans, why does evil exist?

Death

- Death is the end of sense-experience
- Sense-experience is the only experience human beings have
- So, death is nothing to human beings
- This removes the disquieting longing for immortality
- And it removes fear of death, in which a future event upsets the present

Life

- Living does not offend the wise person
- He savors the most pleasant time, rather than the longest time
- What will happen is not unconditionally within our power
- Nor is it unconditionally outside our power
- So, one must not expect to control everything or despair that all is inevitable

Desires

- There are several sorts of desires
- Some desires have no basis in nature (e.g., desire for jewelry)
- Others have a basis in nature
 - Some are not necessary (they produce no pain if not fulfilled, e.g., desire for a banquet of rich food)
 - Some are necessary
 - For happiness
 - For freeing the body from troubles
 - For life itself

Pleasure and Pain

- Every choice and avoidance should be referred to necessary natural desires
- What they have in common is freedom from pain
- We only need pleasure when its absence causes pain
- When we are not in pain we need no pleasure
- The greatest pleasure is mental

Living Blessedly

- Pleasure is the starting-point for living blessedly
- It is the first innate good, present from birth
- Although every pleasure is a good thing, not all should be chosen
- Those pleasures which result in pain should be avoided, while pains that result in great pleasure should be embraced
- We need to calculate the balance of pleasure and pain, as we often are wrong about it at first

Self-Sufficiency

- Being self-sufficient is conducive to the blessed life
- Those who do not need abundant goods are better able to find happiness
 - It is easier to obtain
 - What is obtained is enjoyed most
- Becoming accustomed to simple pleasures puts us in the best condition
 - It makes us healthy
 - It makes us fearless in the face of chance

Justice and Injustice

- There is no injustice where there are no agreements made, but justice exists only when there is a pact that does not harm either party
- Injustice is not bad in itself, but only produces fear of punishment
- Due to this fear, one cannot avoid harm from injustice
- Justice is generally the same for all, but different things may be just in different circumstances
- Justice exists only as long as the pact is useful

Ancient Atomism

- Epicurus's physics was an adaptation of the views of the earlier atomists Leucippus and Democritus
- Aristotle tells us that atomism was developed as a response to Parmenidean monism
- Thus although a physical theory, atomism has a metaphysical motivation

The Challenge of Parmenides

- Parmenides held that being must have several characteristics
 - Unity
 - Permanence
 - Indivisibility
 - Immobility
- If being lacks any of them, it would be what is not, which is a contradiction

The Atomist's Answer

- The atomists grant to Parmenides that whatever is has the first three of the characteristics
 - Unity
 - Permanence
 - Indivisibility
- They allow that there is a plurality of things, each one of which has these characteristics
- Such things are called “atoms,” or “indivisibles”

The Void

- Parmenides held that it is impossible to think what is not
- The Atomists denied this
- They held that the atoms are separated from one another by a “void” which is non-being
- Thus, the universe consists both of what is and what is not
- “They also say that what is is no more a being than what is not, because body is no more of a being than the empty is”
(*Metaphysics* 985b)

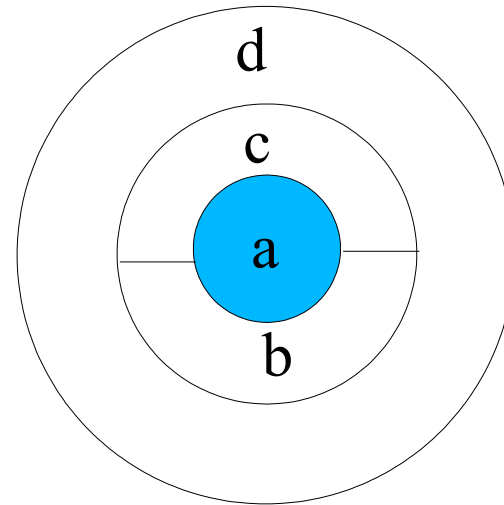
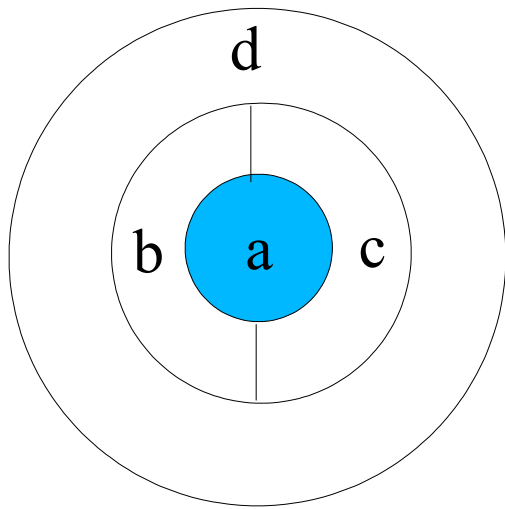
The Void and Motion

- The void is needed to explain the possibility of motion, which is detected by the sense
- Suppose there were atoms and no void
- Then all the surfaces of all the atoms would be in contact with one another
- An atom surrounded by other atoms cannot change its position relative to another atom with which it is in contact
- So an atom in a plenum cannot move

Aristotle's Rebuttal

- Aristotle denied that an atom surrounded by other atoms cannot change its position relative to another atom with which it is in contact
- This can take place in circular motion
- In general, motion for Aristotle always requires a circuit

Illustration of Circular Motion



Properties of Atoms

- Atoms have a number of different types of properties, which include
 - Shape, size and weight
 - Theoretically, any atom can have any shape or size, but in fact atoms are very small
 - Capacity to rebound off one another
 - Motion relative to other atoms
 - Motion is explained by impact of other atoms
 - Tendency to form aggregates

Epicurus's Enhancement

- Aristotle criticized the atomists for leaving the origin of motion unexplained
 - “They were too lazy to take up the question about motion and to ask from what source and in what way it arises in beings” (*Metaphysics* 985b)
- Epicurus held that atoms have a natural downward motion due to their weight
- Motion as a result of collision is a re-direction of the natural motion

The Swerve

- Natural motion is downward, so atoms naturally move in parallel with one another
- If this is so, how can the contact of atoms with one another be explained?
- Epicurus postulated an initial swerve, which began a chain-reaction of collisions
- But he had no explanation of why the swerve occurred in the first place
- Cicero claimed that it was introduced as a way to avoid determinism

Fate

- The swerve occurs without a determinate cause
- This makes the universe indeterministic
- If the universe is indeterministic, then nothing happens through fate
- Human beings are not bound by fate because they are composed of atoms
- But can the unexplained behavior of atoms account for human beings controlling their own actions?

Perceptible Bodies

- Perceptible bodies are composed of atoms
- All characteristics of perceptible bodies are the result of the motion or rest of the atoms that make them up
- Bodies constantly throw off sheets of atoms which interact with our senses and give us knowledge

The Soul

- Epicurus was a materialist
- The human soul is an organ of the body
- It exists in the chest
- It commands motion in the rest of the body
- The motion is carried through a very fine atomic matter that is distributed throughout the body
- At death, the soul ceases to exist