

# Episode 321 - EATAQ 03 - The Epicurean Criticism of Socrates For Denouncing Natural Science

Post by "Cassius" of February 8, 2026 at 12:03 PM

In addition to the reference in Academic Questions, we have these additional citations to consider in contrasting Cicero's praise of Socrates to the Epicurean criticism of Socrates. The Epicurean criticism divides into at least two categories (1) Socrates' abandonment of the study of natural science, with all the many implications of that decision, and - related to that - (2) Socrates' assertion that the only thing he knew was that he knew nothing

- Quote

Nor was Pythagoras the inventor only of the name, but he enlarged also the thing itself, and, when he came into Italy after this conversation at Phlius, he adorned that Greece, which is called Great Greece, both privately and publicly, with the most excellent institutions and arts; but of his school and system, I shall, perhaps, find another opportunity to speak. But numbers and motions, and the beginning and end of all things, were the subjects of the ancient philosophy down to Socrates, who was a pupil of Archelaus, who had been the disciple of Anaxagoras. These made diligent inquiry into the magnitude of the stars, their distances, courses, and all that relates to the heavens. **But Socrates was the first who brought down philosophy from the heavens, placed it in cities, introduced it into families, and obliged it to examine into life and morals, and good and evil.**

And his different methods of discussing questions, together with the variety of his topics, and the greatness of his abilities, being immortalized by the memory and writings of Plato, gave rise to many sects of philosophers of different sentiments: of all which I have principally adhered to that one which, in my opinion, Socrates himself followed; and argue so as to conceal my own opinion, while I deliver others from their errors, and so discover what has the greatest appearance of probability in every question. And the custom Carneades adopted with great copiousness and acuteness, and I myself have often given in to it on many occasions elsewhere, and in this manner, too, I disputed lately, in my Tusculan villa; indeed I have sent you a book of the four former days' discussions; but the fifth day, when we had seated ourselves as before, what we were to dispute on was proposed thus:—

--Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Book 5, paragraph 4

That's what I would contrast with the statements of Epicurus emphasizing natural philosophy as essential, and then Diogenes of Oinoanda

Fr. 4

... [as is supposed by] some of the philosophers and especially the Socratics. They say that pursuing natural science and busying oneself with investigation of [celestial phenomena] is superfluous and unprofitable, and they do [not even] deign [to concern themselves with such matters.]

Fr. 5

Others do not] explicitly [stigmatise] natural science as unnecessary, being ashamed to acknowledge [this], but use another means of discarding it. For, when they assert that things are inapprehensible, what else are they saying than that there is no need for us to pursue natural science? After all, who will choose to seek what he can never find?

Now Aristotle and those who hold the same Peripatetic views as Aristotle say that nothing is scientifically knowable, because things are continually in flux and, on account of the rapidity of the flux, evade our apprehension. We on the other hand acknowledge their flux, but not its being so rapid that the nature of each thing [is] at no time apprehensible by sense-perception. And indeed [in no way would the upholders of] the view under discussion have been able to say (and this is just what they do [maintain] that [at one time] this is [white] and this black, while [at another time] neither this is [white nor] that black, [if] they had not had [previous] knowledge of the nature of both white and black.

And the so-called [ephectic philosophers], of whom Lacydes [of Cyrene]...