

Episode 328 - EATAQ 10 - Sensation - While Neither Right or Wrong - As The Touchstone Of Reality

Post by "Cassius" of April 4, 2026 at 6:58 PM

Welcome to Episode 328 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

This week we start are continuing our series reviewing Cicero's "Academic Questions" from an Epicurean perspective. We are focusing first on what is referred to as Book One, which provides an overview of the issues that split Plato's Academy and gives us an overview of the philosophical issues being dealt with at the time of Epicurus. This week will focus on the ending of [Section 8](#).

Our text will come from

[Cicero - Academic Questions - Yonge](#) We'll likely stick with Yonge primarily, but we'll also refer to the Rackam translation here:

- [Cicero On Nature Of Gods Academica Loeb Rackham : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Quote

VIII.

The third part of philosophy, which is next in order, being conversant about reason and discussion, was thus handled by both schools. They said that, although it originated in the senses, still the power of judging of the truth was not in the senses. They insisted upon it that intellect was the judge of things. They thought that the only thing deserving of belief, because it alone discerned that which was always simple and uniform, and which perceived its real character. This they call idea, having already received this name from Plato; and we properly entitle it species.

But they thought that all the senses were dull and slow, and that they did not by any means perceive those things which appeared subjected to the senses; which were either so small as to be unable to come under the notice of sense, or so moveable and

rapid that none of them was ever one consistent thing, nor even the same thing, because everything was in a continual state of transition and disappearance. And therefore they called all this division of things one resting wholly on opinion. But they thought that science had no existence anywhere except in the notions and reasonings of the mind; on which account they approved of the definitions of things, and employed them on everything which was brought under discussion. The explanation of words also was approved of — that is to say, the explanation of the cause why everything was named as it was; and that they called etymology. Afterwards they used arguments, and, as it were, marks of things, for the proof and conclusion of what they wished to have explained; in which the whole system of dialectics — that is to say, of an oration brought to its conclusion by ratiocination, was handed down. And to this there was added, as a kind of second part, the oratorical power of speaking, which consists in developing a continued discourse, composed in a manner adapted to produce conviction.

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/71242274/media>

Post by “Joshua” of April 5, 2026 at 9:49 AM

Quote

First, I must distinguish between that which always is and never becomes and which is apprehended by reason and reflection, and that which always becomes and never is and is conceived by opinion with the help of sense. All that becomes and is created is the work of a cause, and that is fair which the artificer makes after an eternal pattern, but whatever is fashioned after a created pattern is not fair. Is the world created or uncreated?—that is the first question. Created, I reply, being visible and tangible and having a body, and therefore sensible; and if sensible, then created; and if created, made by a cause, and the cause is the ineffable father of all things, who had before him an eternal archetype. For to imagine that the archetype was created would be blasphemy, seeing that the world is the noblest of creations, and God is the best of causes. And the world being thus created according to the eternal pattern is the copy of something; and we may assume that words are akin to the matter of which they speak. What is spoken of the unchanging or intelligible must be certain and true; but what is spoken of the created image can only be probable; being is to becoming what truth is to belief. And amid the variety of opinions which have arisen about God and the

nature of the world we must be content to take probability for our rule, considering that I, who am the speaker, and you, who are the judges, are only men; to probability we may attain but no further.

Why did the Creator make the world?...He was good, and therefore not jealous, and being free from jealousy he desired that all things should be like himself. Wherefore he set in order the visible world, which he found in disorder. Now he who is the best could only create the fairest; and reflecting that of visible things the intelligent is superior to the unintelligent, he put intelligence in soul and soul in body, and framed the universe to be the best and fairest work in the order of nature, and the world became a living soul through the providence of God.

-[Timaeus](#), Plato, transl. Benjamin Jowett

Post by “Cassius” of April 5, 2026 at 5:21 PM

I am likely to eventually break this out into a discussion of its own, but in this episode of the podcast Joshua brings up the question of "doxa" vs "episteme." From wikipedia:

Doxa ([Ancient Greek](#): δόξα; from verb δοκεῖν, *dokein*, 'to appear, to seem, to think, to accept') [\[1\]](#) is a common belief or popular opinion. In [classical rhetoric](#), *doxa* is contrasted with [episteme](#) ('knowledge').

We're having many simultaneous discussions about these issues right now, and it seems to me to be a good idea to try to be as clear as possible on what Epicurus considered to be "knowledge" vs what he considered to be "opinion."

"Knowledge" is a term to me that seems pretty clear, but probably "opinion" needs clarification as to whether "opinion" (as a word standing alone) is always to be viewed with suspicion, (probably yes?) while "knowledge" (as a word standing alone) implies something much more firm.

So that's something that needs to be clarified, but after that, the big issue is deciding what Epicurus held to be "known" and therefore relied upon with confidence vs "opinion" in which probability might be the best that can be said for it.

Specifically, as examples, did Epicurus hold [PD01](#) and [PD02](#) as written to be "knowledge" or some lesser standard, better described as "opinion."

Clearly Epicurus held many things mentioned in the letter to Pythocles to be open to numbers of possibilities, so as to those mostly astronomical issues I'd say those are "opinion."

But what about the affirmative statements in [PD01](#), [PD02](#)? We'll also want to consider the many affirmative statements made in the letter to Menoeceus, and the most general of statements in Herodotus, but we ought not bite off more than can be chewed too quickly.

Were the positions stated in [PD01](#) and [PD02](#) considered by Epicurus to be "known" (knowledge)? Would he have admitted any aspect of them to be only "probably" true?

EDIT: It will presumably be important to incorporate as primary sources:

1. What Lucretius says about this topic in Book 4 (a very long section but [especially here](#))
2. What Diogenes of Oinoanda has to say about this in Fragment 5.
 1. 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.

Post by "Cassius" of April 9, 2026 at 4:18 PM

At around the 20 minute mark in this episode Joshua refers to an important David Sedley observation, but we did not have the quote at hand. Here is the full section, from his "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism," with the main part Joshua was referencing underlined:

Quote from David Sedley - Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism

In confirmation of this, we can return to the close and apparently conscious parallelism between Epicurus' treatments of determinism and scepticism. The sceptics refuted in Lucretius IV must be, or prominently include, those fourth-century Democriteans like Metrodorus of Chios, Anaxarchus, and even Epicurus' own reviled teacher Nausiphanes, who had played up the sceptical side of Democritus' thought, and against whom Epicurus was eager to marshal the positive empiricist arguments which Democritus had also bequeathed. This scepticism was the result of what I shall call reductionist atomism. Because phenomenal objects and properties seemed to reduce to mere configurations of atoms and void, Democritus was inclined to suppose that the atoms and void were real while the phenomenal objects and properties were no more than arbitrary constructions placed upon them by human cognitive organs. In his more extreme moods Democritus was even inclined to doubt the power of human judgment, since judgment was itself no more than a realignment of atoms in the mind.

Epicurus' response to this is perhaps the least appreciated aspect of his thought. It was to reject reductionist atomism. Almost uniquely among Greek philosophers he arrived at what is nowadays the unreflective assumption of almost anyone with a smattering of science, that there are truths at the microscopic level of elementary particles, and further very different truths at the phenomenal level; that the former must be capable of explaining the latter; but that neither level of description has a monopoly of truth. (The truth that sugar is sweet is not straightforwardly reducible to the truth that it has such and such a molecular structure, even though the latter truth may be required in order to explain the former). By establishing that cognitive scepticism, the direct outcome of reductionist atomism, is self-refuting and untenable in practice, Epicurus justifies his non-reductionist alternative, according to which sensations are true and there are therefore bona fide truths at the phenomenal level accessible through them. The same will apply to the pathē (feelings), which Epicurus also held to be veridical. Pleasure, for example, is a direct datum of experience. It is commonly assumed that Epicurus must have equated pleasure with such and such a kind of movement of soul atoms; but although he will have taken it to have some explanation at the atomic level, I know of no evidence that he, any more than most moral philosophers or psychologists, would have held that an adequate analysis of it could be found at that level.

Post by "Cassius" of April 9, 2026 at 4:27 PM

I don't know that we used it in this episode, but there's another phrase that we should probably be referring to more often in this discussion: "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" -

which has to be explained as a natural phenomena rather than implying anything supernatural.

Post by “Cassius” of April 10, 2026 at 5:57 PM

Episode 329 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week our episode is entitled: "Sensation - While Neither Right Or Wrong - As The Touchstone Of Reality"

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/71242274/media>

Post by “Patrikios” of April 21, 2026 at 5:42 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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[Cassius](#)

These two links are broken (404 Error).

Post by “Cassius” of April 21, 2026 at 6:41 PM

Should be fixed now!

thanks