

Epicurean Philosophy vs Charvaka / Lokayata

Post by “Julia” of January 15, 2025 at 9:25 AM

I didn't expect anything on Charvaka in the threads on Buddhism! Here's the difference pointed out in the post Don has linked to:

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

Epicurean theology is comparatively unique. Epicurus would have been opposed to the atheism of Ājīvika, Chārvāka, Nyāya, and Vaisheshika, as well as the agnosticism of Ajñāna and Buddhism, as well as the immanent dualism and mysticism of Samkhya and Yoga, and also the divine idealism of Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. The Jain universe of multiple, physical deities (the Tirthankaras), is the closest ancient Indian theology that in any way resembles Epicureanism. There is not, to my knowledge, any significant historical link between the two at any point in time.

Encouraged by that, I read chapters 10 and 11 of Bhattacharya's later book (*More Studies on ...*), titled "The Cārvāka / Lokāyata and Greek Materialism" and "Materialism: East and West", respectively. The congruence with Epicurean philosophy – even where the slandering by opposing schools and later scholars is concerned... – is astounding. I found just one more difference:

On page 110, Bhattacharya writes: "Both the Presocratic proto-materialist philosophers and the Cārvākas started from the premise of four elements as constituting the whole world." Later, on page 115, he expands: "The system betrays a very early origin, since it is firmly rooted in the concept of four basic elements (bhūtas, viz., earth, air, fire, and water)." Note that the Cārvākas did *not* consider these elements to be ideals or essences, but thought of them as matter, as constituents of reality as evidenced through the senses. It is my current understanding that some Cārvākas might very well have developed their physics into a more sophisticated system, especially when considering these and related materialist philosophical schools had a living tradition persisting for roughly 1750 of years! For example, while in the 8th century CE, the Cārvākas were still speaking of four elements, two centuries later a related southern Indian school called Bhūtavāda expanded on those by adding the void as a fifth element (page 121/122 in *More Studies on ...*; translated from ancient Tamil as "space"). In the 12th century CE, they all mysteriously vanished.

Unfortunately, the Charvaka's core text as well as their extensions / explanations of it are lost, which means we might not find much more in terms of reasonably certain, reliable differences between their system and Epicurean philosophy...