

Epicurean Philosophy vs Charvaka / Lokayata

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 15, 2025 at 9:30 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Thanks to Don for pointing to that thread. We have several people who are particularly familiar with those philosophies and I seem to recall that Eikadistes' knowledge was particularly detailed.

Indeed. 😊👍

[Quote from Julia](#)

What do we know about *the differences* between Epicurean Philosophy and Charvaka / Lokayata?

Hi, [Julia](#)!

One of the biggest differences we notes between the Epicurean Tradition and ancient Indian materialism is the tone: Epicurus recommended that we treat our neighbors with respect, whereas the writings of Charvaka are fairly critical and mocking. *I like it, personally...*

*There is no world other than this;
There is no heaven and no hell;
The realm of Shiva and like regions,
are fabricated by stupid imposters.* – Sarvasiddhanta Samgraha, Verse 7

Theologically, the Epicureans endorsed the existence of deities, whereas the Indian materialists saw them as being pure fictions of misinformed, human imaginations.

The philosophers of the Charvaka tradition also rejected atomism, whereas (interestingly) no less than two, orthodox branches of ancient pre-Hindu philosophy both proposed a form of atomism (and Diogenes Laërtius reports that Democritus, himself, may have travelled to India to advance his education: "Some say that he associated with the Gymnosophists in India").

It is possible that Democritus borrowed atomism from the Vaisheshika tradition.

The Charvaka were physical pluralists, like Empedocles, so they divided the material world into elements, and associated atomism with orthodox, religious philosophy.

Nonetheless, we find many more similarities than differences. Both rejected the afterlife, both contextualized human existence as that of an animal, both saw the emergence of

consciousness as a temporary phenomena that will burn out like a candle, both were materialists and hedonists who affirmed that pleasure is the positive goal in life.

An interesting point to note is the framing of Buddhism as the "Middle Way". Whereas Hindu eternalism is on one extreme, so Charvaka was recognized as being the opposite. Contrary to every orthodox philosophy (and a few heterodox), Charvaka also rejected karma and reincarnation.