

Epicurean Outreach Opportunity - Respond to Article on Spirituality

Post by "Bryan" of February 28, 2025 at 12:01 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

I thought that Epicurus used "soul" to refer to that which conveyed our thoughts to our body, muscles; which we know today as our nervous system.

Hello Patrikios! I hope all is well. Yes this is also my understanding.

We are all comfortable with the word Epíkouros uses here "Psychē." As we all know, this word, along with many others, has been used in a way that does not correspond to nature or reality. This can lead the "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" effect.

Half the population thinks "there is no soul" and the other half knows they have a soul and "it is immortal" -- Epíkouros' way is to preserve the word, but to explain it in physically-based and non-supernatural terms.

Epíkouros emphasizes that we can control our thoughts and therefore are responsible for our own movements and behaviour (*in contrast, for example, to Dēmókritos, who viewed our apparent self-generated movement to be transcending nature and therefore determined that it must be an illusion.*)

[Quote from Cassius](#)

so I would be cautious about dividing them up more specifically

Yes, anyone familiar with Plato should develop a fatigue for specific definition-based divisions, and this was the case for Epíkouros. There is a limit to how specific we can be -- which is baked into the system right from the start regarding the soul...

Epíkouros says the soul has thermal (hot & fast), pneumatic (cold & slow) aspects, as well as a mixture of these two -- giving the aerial (moderate) characteristics:

"The soul is a subtle body, spread out across the whole aggregate, most closely resembling cool wind ["pneumatic"] that has a certain mixture of heat ["thermal"], indeed, in one way, it is closely resembling the one, and in another way, [it is closely resembling] the other." (D.L. 10.63a)

But the labeling stops there, as the third aspect remains unnamed:

"The third part exists, having acquired great variety in subtleness even compared to those [thermal and pneumatic elements] themselves – and because of this, [the third part is] more harmonious also with the remaining aggregate." (63b)

[1] Thermal Element	● τό Θερμόν	Calor, Vapor
[2] Pneumatic Element	● τό Πνευματικόν	Ventus, Aura
[1 & 2] Aerial Mix	● τό Ἀερώδες	Aer
[3] Unnamed Element	○ τό Ἄκατονόμαστον	Nominis Experts

Epíkouros was adamant that all incorrect ideas come from the addition of thought (not from sensation). If I think I see water at a distance in a desert -- it may be water or it may be a mirage, but I know I must use what I sense (in this case what I see) as a starting point for further inference.

The prólēpsis is "the idea" you sense in your mind before you "manipulate" that idea in your mind by thinking. This "idea" is really an immediate sensation. The connection between the word "water" and your immediate mental image of water is direct and automatic -- it exists in your mind before active consideration. It is this basic "pre-thought" sense that is the proleptic sense.