

The Use of Negation in Epicurean Philosophy Concepts

Post by "Eikadistes" of April 22, 2025 at 9:17 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Don](#) any thoughts on this? Maybe you have something to add about the use of negation in ancient Greek language, and the pattern of words that often occurs?

I'm sorry, [Kalosyni](#). This flew under my radar. I don't have any thoughts off the top of my head, but I'm intrigued. I'll share any I might discover. Maybe [Bryan](#) or @Eikadistes would have thoughts?

That said, great posts here on this thread. Y'all are providing some solid summaries of the "absence of pain" idea.

[Rolf](#) For recently joining our little online Garden, your contributions are insightful and greatly appreciated. Glad to have you aboard.

As I've observed with other philosophers, Epíkouros is no stranger to capitalizing on Hellenic word formation by coining his own phrases with affixes, so he does occasionally throw the prefix *ἀ-* to render "**not [this]**" when re-naming a positive idea and re-framing it as a negation. I don't necessarily think that is a defining quality of his literary voice, but it may reflect his philosophical approach.

The one thing I definitely see in terms of negation is his reasoning:

- I. "**A is the case.**"
- II. "**If B were the case, we would observe Y.**"
- III. "**In fact, we observe X, not Y.**"
- IV. "**Therefore A is the case.**"

For example:

- I. "**Particles have a maximum, tiny size.**"
- II. "**If they didn't, we would see particles with the naked eye.**"
- III. "**We cannot see particles.**"
- IV. "**Therefore, particles have a maximum, tiny size.**"

Now, all that said, who you **really** want for this discussion is Nietzsche. **100%**. Epicurean theory of language is about frankness. All words are indicative, and each word reflects exactly one object or idea with a 1:1 evaluation. Preconceptions reinforce this, that there are universal notions that all humans shared based on similar experience, and those notions are positive indications of *what is*. Nietzsche, on the other hand **thrived** with linguistic negation. He has an extensive discussion of language and the development of speech wherein he proposes (this is key) that "*truth is a mobile army of metaphors*", meaning that every word is figurative, and can only be defined in relation to *what is* **not**. He might suggest that "*blue*" is less usefully defined as "*the dark, cold color*" or "*cloudless sky*", and is more usefully defined as "*not red-orange-yellow-green-violet*": (EDIT: Or, a better example, he explains that you cannot define a word without using other words that don't mean what that word means.)

Come to think of it, Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, has a great discussion about this idea. I forget where (I want to say a TV interview?) but he proposes that every word is a metaphor. This, however, contrasts with the Hegemon, who sees metaphors as potential slippery-slopes to myth. Of course, Joseph Campbell sees everything as the function of a myth ... so there's that:

"Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*)