

Episode 321 - EATAQ 03 - The Epicurean Criticism of Socrates For Denouncing Natural Science

Post by “Cassius” of February 15, 2026 at 3:16 PM

It's beginning to be clear that the Socratic position mentioned by Diogenes of Oinoanda as being opposed to the study of natural science constitute a major bright line division between them and Epicurus. Apparently that same distinction did not exist between Epicurus and the Stoics. Pending confirmation here's an AI summary:

Quote

In contrast to Socrates, the **Stoics** regarded the study of natural science (*physikē*) as not only desirable but philosophically necessary.

For the Stoics—beginning with **Zeno of Citium** and systematized by thinkers such as **Chrysippus**—philosophy was divided into three interdependent parts: logic, ethics, and physics. Physics, which included cosmology, theology, and the study of nature as a rational, ordered whole, was essential because it grounded ethics. One could not fully understand how to live well without understanding how the universe itself is structured and governed.

The Stoics held that the universe is an ordered, rational system permeated by *logos* (reason). Studying nature therefore reveals the rational principles by which the cosmos operates, including divine providence and necessity. Ethical ideals such as “living in accordance with nature” depend directly on correct physical understanding; without physics, moral prescriptions would lack foundation. In this sense, natural science had clear ethical value, not merely speculative interest.

This position marks a clear disagreement with **Socrates**. Whereas Socrates treated cosmological inquiry as largely irrelevant or distracting from moral self-examination, the Stoics saw it as indispensable to moral progress. While they agreed with Socrates that ethics is the ultimate aim of philosophy, they rejected his dismissal of natural science and instead integrated it tightly into their ethical system.

In summary, the Stoics explicitly *did not* agree with Socrates on this point: they affirmed the study of natural science as a crucial and valuable component of philosophy, necessary for understanding both the cosmos and the proper conduct of human life.