

# Episode 331 - EATAQ 13 - The Self-Defeating Paradox of Radical Skepticism

Post by "Cassius" of April 25, 2026 at 1:47 PM

Welcome to Episode 331 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at [EpicureanFriends.com](http://EpicureanFriends.com), where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

This week we start are continuing our series reviewing Cicero's "Academic Questions" from an Epicurean perspective. We are focusing first on what is referred to as Book One, which provides an overview of the issues that split Plato's Academy and gives us an overview of the philosophical issues being dealt with at the time of Epicurus. This week will focus on [Section 12](#). and transition to Book Two, where we will begin with [Section 7](#)

Our text will come from

[Cicero - Academic Questions - Yonge](#) We'll likely stick with Yonge primarily, but we'll also refer to the Rackam translation here:

- [Cicero On Nature Of Gods Academica Loeb Rackham : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

## XII.

And when he had spoken thus — You have, said I, O Varro, explained the principles both of the Old Academy and of the Stoics with brevity, but also with great clearness. But I think it to be true, as Antiochus, a great friend of mine, used to assert, that it is to be considered rather as a corrected edition of the Old Academy, than as any new sect.

Then Varro replied — It is your part now, who revolt from the principles of the ancients, and who approve of the innovations which have been made by Arcesilas, to explain what that division of the two schools which he made was, and why he made it; so that we may see whether that revolt of his was justifiable.

Then I replied — Arcesilas, as we understand, directed all his attacks against Zeno, not out of obstinacy or any desire of gaining the victory, as it appears to me, but by reason of the obscurity of those things which had brought Socrates to the confession of ignorance, and even before Socrates, Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and nearly all the ancients; who

asserted that nothing could be ascertained, or perceived, or known: that the senses of man were narrow, his mind feeble, the course of his life short, and that truth, as Democritus said, was sunk in the deep; that everything depended on opinions and established customs; that nothing was left to truth. They said in short, that everything was enveloped in darkness; therefore Arcesilas asserted that there was nothing which could be known, not even that very piece of knowledge which Socrates had left himself.

Thus he thought that everything lay hid in secret, and that there was nothing which could be discerned or understood; for which reasons it was not right for any one to profess or affirm anything, or sanction anything by his assent, but men ought always to restrain their rashness and to keep it in check so as to guard it against every fall. For rashness would be very remarkable when anything unknown or false was approved of; and nothing could be more discreditable than for a man's assent and approbation to precede his knowledge and perception of a fact. And he used to act consistently with these principles, so as to pass most of his days in arguing against every one's opinion, in order that when equally important reasons were found for both sides of the same question, the judgment might more naturally be suspended, and prevented from giving assent to either.

This they call the New Academy, which however appears to me to be the old one, if, at least, we reckon Plato as one of that Old Academy. For in his books nothing is affirmed positively, and many arguments are allowed on both sides of a question; everything is investigated, and nothing positive affirmed. Still let the school whose principles I have explained, be called the Old Academy, and this other the New; which, having continued to the time of Carneades, who was the fourth in succession after Arcesilas, continued in the same principles and system as Arcesilas. But Carneades, being a man ignorant of no part of philosophy, and, as I have learned from those who had been his pupils, and particularly from Zeno the Epicurean, who, though he greatly differed from him in opinion, still admired him above all other men, was also a person of incredible abilities...

The rest of this Book is lost.

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