

# David Sedley: "Sextus Empiricus And The Atomist Criterion of Truth"

Post by "Cassius" of July 1, 2019 at 5:13 PM

This article contains interesting commentary on the development of Epicurus' canon of truth.

File

[David Sedley - Sextus Empiricus And The Atomist Criterion of Truth](#)



David Sedley - Sextus Empiricus And The Atomist Criterion of Truth



Cassius

July 1, 2019 at 5:17 PM

Also at this link: <http://lexicon.cnr.it/index.php/DDL/article/view/123/62>

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Post by "Cassius" of March 30, 2023 at 9:11 AM

Almost FOUR years later and I still haven't read this article in detail (that I can recall). However today I see (as Academia sends it to me for the 100th time) that it does have a very interesting first page showing divisions of philosophers and commenting how Democritus and Epicurus are not at all always in the same camp, and how Sextus apparently places Epicurus in the same camp as the Stoics and Plato on this point.

## 1. Introduction

The section of Sextus, *Adversus mathematicos*, VII, devoted to the history of theories on the criterion<sup>1</sup> divides up as follows:

46-7: views on the criterion: 1, there is no criterion; 2 (a), the criterion is in *logos*; (b) the criterion is in *enargeia*; (c) the criterion is in *logos* and *enargeia*.

(1) Those who say there is no criterion

49-52	Xenophanes
53-4	Xeniades
55-9	Anacharsis
60-4	Protagoras
64	Euthydemus and Dionysodorus
65-87	Gorgias
87-8	Metrodorus, Anaxarchus, Monimus

(2) Those who say there is a criterion...

...in *logos*

	“Physicists”
89-91	Anaxagoras

22

DAVID SEDLEY

110	Xenophanes (again!)
111-4	Parmenides
115-25	Empedocles
126-34	Heraclitus
135-40	Democritus

...in *enargeia* (with or without *logos*)

“Post-physicists”

141-4	Plato
145-6	Speusippus
147-9	Xenocrates
150-8	Arcesilaus
159-89	Carneades
190-200	Cyrenaics
201-2	[Asclepiades]
203-16	Epicurus
217-26	Peripatetics
227-60	Stoics
261-2	retrospect

Thus, in the event, 2 (b) and 2 (c) are conflated, and we end up with three principal divisions. It is instructive to note that the philosophers conventionally known to us as “atomists” are distributed between these three divisions: Metrodorus of Chios and Anaxarchus fall into the no-criterion group, Democritus into the *logos*-only group, and Epicurus into the *enargeia* group. This serves as a reminder, if one were needed, that atomism is to some extent a doxographical fiction, indeed one to which modern doxographers are more wedded than their ancient counterparts. Although the names of Democritus and Epicurus are often linked in the ancient sources with regard to their basic physical tenets — “atomism” in the strict sense — they are equally often contrasted with regard to their theories of knowledge and numerous other doctrines. Sextus himself is no exception to this pattern<sup>2</sup>. In most