

# Someone Who Understands What Makes Epicurean Philosophy Unique.

**Post by "Cassius" of December 2, 2019 at 9:19 AM**

The excerpt below is not directed at Nietzsche or Al-Razi, but it contains an independent insight that is worth taking out of that context. This paragraph points to what really makes Epicurus unique and important - not his ethics, but his insight into the nature of the universe. "Positing only material atoms and the void, the Epicureans attempt to account for all being, knowledge, and value without relying upon any "supernatural" explanatory entities." Without this foundation, the ethics lead nowhere:

**Peter S. Groff**

Department of Philosophy, Bucknell University  
pgroff@bucknell.edu

### *Garden-Variety Epicureanism*

Before examining al-Rāzī and Nietzsche as wayward Epicureans, I will first very quickly sketch out the general doctrines that I am associating with this school.<sup>12</sup> As I understand it, the most striking and unique characteristic of Epicureanism is its rejection of Socrates' paradigmatic "second sailing" (*deuteros plous*).<sup>13</sup> That is to say, it resists the powerful impulse, whether intellectual or emotional, to move above and beyond the explanatory resources of the material world—the natural realm of generation and destruction—and posit some more fundamental, timeless, changeless, supersensible reality that serves as the ultimate basis of all being, value, and intelligibility. Interpreted in this broad sense, the "second sailing" can be understood as the drive toward some kind of transcendent metaphysics or theology. Historically, this has manifested itself in a number of different ways: in Socrates' autobiographical discussion in the *Phaedo* it takes shape as Plato's Forms, but it could also find expression as the abstract, intellectualized "God of the Philosophers" (a kind of causal anchor we might posit in order to explain the temporal origin, sustained existence, or apparent teleology of the natural world), or the more personalized transcendent creator God of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Epicurus and his followers preemptively resist this move in all its forms and attempt to offer us instead a purely naturalistic interpretation of the world.<sup>14</sup> Positing only material atoms and the void, the Epicureans attempt to account for all being, knowledge, and value without relying upon any "supernatural" explanatory entities.<sup>15</sup> In effect, Epicurus and his progeny endeavor to explain all phenomena through some combination of natural necessity and chance, without any reference to preexisting intelligence or design.<sup>16</sup>

—

---

## **Post by "Joshua" of December 2, 2019 at 9:29 AM**

Very good! George Santayana put it this way;

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1297-someone-who-understands-what-makes-epicurean-philosophy-unique/>

This double experience of mutation and recurrence, an experience at once sentimental and scientific, soon brought with it a very great thought, perhaps the greatest thought that mankind has ever hit upon, and which was the chief inspiration of Lucretius. It is that all we observe about us, and ourselves also, may be so many passing forms of a permanent substance.

"The greatest thought mankind has ever hit upon."

It can be difficult to appreciate from this distance what a revolution in human thought this was.

<http://monadnock.net/santayana/lucretius.html>

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of December 2, 2019 at 9:53 AM**

Here is a very informative response from a FB poster:

"Second sailing or second voyage" is an Ancient Greek sailing proverb; "when the wind fails, we use the oars." Plato uses the term in Phaedo 99d. He claims that the physicists were not able to satisfy him regarding the true causes of nature. He finds a clue in Anaxagoras' notion of mind (nous) and believes dialectic can take him the rest of the way. Hence, the move from the natural power of the wind to the artificial power of the oars. I think it is correct to characterize Epicureanism as rejecting the second voyage. Addressing Plato's concerns regarding the failure of the Physicist to explain adequately the causes of nature would surely have been one of Epicurus' key objectives.

---

### **Post by "Cassius" of December 2, 2019 at 10:47 AM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1297-someone-who-understands-what-makes-epicurean-philosophy-unique/>



[99d] do you wish me, Cebes,” said he, “to give you an account of the way in which I have conducted my second voyage in quest of the cause?”

“I wish it with all my heart,” he replied.

“After this, then,” said he, “since I had given up investigating realities, I decided that I must be careful not to suffer the misfortune which happens to people who look at the sun and watch it during an eclipse. For some of them ruin their eyes unless they look at its image in water

So the Epicurean orientation toward pleasure-seeking stems from the foundation of the Epicurean orientation toward reality, not the other way around. Pleasure and pain are realities to us, and so feeling is a part of the Epicurean canon of truth, while dialectical logic is not.

Also: <https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/phaedo/section9/>