

# Useful Brief Article With Info On Development of Skepticism Within Academy - Thanks Nate!

Post by "Cassius" of May 3, 2021 at 6:46 AM

Thanks to Nate's recent [meme](#) I see [this entry from the 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica](#) which describes the Academy's descent into skepticism, from Socrates' former position "I know that I know nothing" to Arcesilaus taking the position that he did not even know that he knows nothing.

The article references the Stoics taking the position that certainty can come through "the Stoical theory of perception, the φαντασία καταληπτική, by which they expressed a conviction of certainty arising from impressions so strong as to amount to science," and then references Carneades (who [Nikolsky](#) says was probably the source for why Laertius erroneously thought the kinetic/katastematic distinction was significant to Epicurus)

take the Academy into "the doctrine of acatalepsia, which denied any necessary correspondence between perceptions and the objects perceived. He saved himself, however, from absolute scepticism by the doctrine of probability or verisimilitude, which may serve as a practical guide in life. Thus his criterion of imagination (φαντασία) is that it must be credible, irrefutable and attested by comparison with other impressions; it may be wrong, but for the person concerned it is valid. In ethics he was an avowed sceptic. During his official visit to Rome, he gave public lectures, in which he successively proved and disproved with equal ease the existence of justice."

This is a very useful quick but authoritative statement on these issues for which we frequently need reference - thanks Nate!

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Post by "Cassius" of May 3, 2021 at 7:10 AM

Note: The 1911 [Brittanica article on Epicurus](#) is not NEARLY so useful, and is in fact insulting to Epicurus. Here are a few examples:

- The mode of life in his community was plain. The general drink was water and the food barley bread; half a pint of wine was held an ample allowance.
- The Epicurean philosophy is traditionally divided into the three branches of logic, physics and ethics. **It is, however, only as a basis of facts and principles for his theory of**

**life that logical and physical inquiries find a place at all. Epicurus himself had not apparently shared in any large or liberal culture, and his influence was certainly thrown on the side of those who depreciated purely scientific pursuits as one-sided and misleading.**

- [Here is an allegation that Epicurus was an extreme empiricist and rejected all reasoning, and erroneously implies that Epicurus thought everyone would feel the same] It was necessary, therefore, for Epicurus to go back to nature to find a more enduring and a wider foundation for ethical doctrine, to go back from words to realities, to give up reasonings and get at feelings, to test conceptions and arguments by a final reference to the only touchstone of truth—to sensation. There, and there only, one seems to find a common and a satisfactory ground, supposing always that all men's feelings give the same answer.
- [An allegation that Epicurus was an anarchist? Where does he get this?] Logic must go, but so also must the state, as a specially-privileged and eternal order of things, as anything more than a contrivance serving certain purposes of general utility.
- [The "[all sensations are true](#)" allegation without discussion of the "without opinion" element.] The only ultimate canon of reality is sensation; whatever we feel, whatever we perceive by any sense, that we know on the most certain evidence we can have to be real, and in proportion as our feeling is clear, distinct and vivid, in that proportion are we sure of the reality of its object. But in what that vividness (ἐνάργεια) consists is a question which Epicurus does not raise, and which he would no doubt have deemed superfluous quibbling over a matter sufficiently settled by common sense.
- [The Laertius version of anticipations.] Besides our sensations, we learn truth and reality by our preconceptions or ideas (προλήψεις). These are the fainter images produced by repeated sensations, the "ideas" resulting from previous "impressions"—sensations at second-hand as it were, which are stored up in memory, and which a general name serves to recall. These bear witness to reality, not because we feel anything now, but because we felt it once; they are sensations registered in language, and again, if need be, translatable into immediate sensations or groups of sensation.
- [He asserts the "fourth" leg of the canon, which Epicurus himself did not.] Lastly, reality is vouched for by the imaginative apprehensions of the mind (φανταστικὰ ἐπιβολά), immediate feelings of which the mind is conscious as produced by some action of its own. This last canon, however, was of dubious validity. Epicureanism generally was content to affirm that whatever we effectively feel in consciousness is real; in which sense they allow reality to the fancies of the insane, the dreams of a sleeper, and those feelings by which we imagine the existence of beings of perfect blessedness and endless life.
- [Says Epicurus was anti-science.] The attitude of Epicurus in this whole matter is antagonistic to science. The idea of a systematic enchainment of phenomena, in which each is conditioned by every other, and none can be taken in isolation and explained apart from the rest, was foreign to his mind. So little was the scientific conception of the solar system familiar to Epicurus that he could reproach the astronomers, because their account of an eclipse represented things otherwise than as they appear to the senses, and could declare that the sun and stars were just as large as they seemed to us.

- [*As you would expect from someone who has a low opinion of Epicurus.*] The test of true pleasure, according to Epicurus, is the removal and absorption of all that gives pain; it implies freedom from pain of body and from trouble of mind. The happiness of the Epicurean was, it might almost seem, a grave and solemn pleasure—a quiet unobtrusive ease of heart, but not exuberance and excitement. The sage of Epicureanism is a rational and reflective seeker for happiness, who balances the claims of each pleasure against the evils that may possibly ensue, and treads the path of enjoyment cautiously.

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