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EPICUREANS. The Epicureans are mentioned in Acts 17:18, along with the Stoics. Luke gives no information on their view, except that they rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection.

1. Moral reputation. Epicurus founded the school in Athens about 300 B.C. In a sense he effected a reformed of the earlier school of Cyrenaics, whose crass slogan is partially quotes in 1 Corinthians 15:32, “Let us eat and drink [and be merry], for tomorrow we die.” contrasted with the licentiousness of the Cyrenaics, the Epicureans as judged by Gr. Or generally human standards advocated a fairly pure morality.

Diogenes Laertius preserved a letter from Epicurus, which reads,

By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking bouts and of revelry, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of fish and other delicacies of luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul.

Epicureanism included even a strain of asceticism. “Sexual intercourse has never done a man any good, and he is lucky if it has not harmed him. Nor will a wise man [except in unusual circumstances] marry and rear a family” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, X, 118, 119).

2. Hedonism. Although the Epicureans identified the aim of life as pleasure, for “No pleasure is a bad thing in itself,” yet to call them hedonists, etymologically correct as it may be, is misleading. Not only “the means which produce some pleasures bring with them disturbances many times greater than the pleasures,” but more profoundly, the Epicureans defined pleasure as the absence of pain. Their aim therefore was not so much the titillations of sense as it was the absence of pain, the avoidance of trouble, and freedom from annoyances.

It was this aim to avoid everything disturbing and to achieve tranquility of mind that motivated their views both on religious and on physics. These two subjects, with the Epicureans as with other schools in the history philosophy, were closely related.

3. Religion, source of evil. The greatest disturber of tranquility of mind and the most prolific source of all evils is the belief that the gods punish evildoers. Lucretius (95-55 B.C.), a Rom.

Epicurean, wrote, “Most often it is religion itself that inspires impious and criminal acts”: e.g. the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father. The fear of the gods disturbs man in his dreams. The thought of punishment in a life beyond the grave tortures man all his days.

Therefore, the fundamental principle for a happy life is, “*Nullam rem e nilo gigni divinitus umquam,*” or, “nothing ever comes about by divine power” (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, I, 150). Confirmation of this principle is later stated: “That the world has by no means been created by divine power is clear from the fact that it contains so many flaws” (ibid. II. 180; V. 195ff.), e.g., “so much of its surface is uninhabitable, the remainder requires hard labor to produce food, the human infant is helpless, the man is harassed by wild beasts, disease, and early death.”

In spite of this last reference to early death, death itself is not an evil. This must be understood, for otherwise the thought of extinction might be as disturbing as the thought of a future life.

Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us. . . . A right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding to life an illimitable time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality. . . . Foolish, therefore, is the man who says he fears death, not because it will pain him when it comes, but because it pains him in the prospect. Whatsoever causes no annoyance when it is present, causes only a groundless pain in the expectation. Death, therefore, the most awful of all evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and when death is come, we are not (Lucretius).

4. Atoms and freedom. All that remains, according to the Epicurean, is to frame an acceptable physics that will see mankind through the present life. If all natural phenomena can be plausibly explained in terms of atoms moving through empty space, the last reason for fearing the gods is gone. Such explanations the Epicureans give of sunlight penetrating the air, of images in mirrors, of the sun and moon, of thunder and lightning, and of many other things, but esp. of sensation and reason—all in terms of atoms moving through empty space.

These explanations need not be the absolute truth. All that is needed to show that no divine purpose rules nature is to give a materialistic account that is possible.

More important than many of these details is the theory of free will. Two opposing theories would make life miserable. First, if God had planned the universe and determined everything, nothing would be in our power and ethics would be impossible. Second, if all the atoms were always mechanically determined, as Democritus taught, the same unacceptable conclusion would follow.

The physical theory is that the atoms generally move in straight lines, but sometimes for no cause whatever swerve just a little. Hence men, that is, human bodies composed of atoms, can

sometimes for no cause whatever, move in oppositions to the laws of mechanics. This is free will.

Hence, nature is to a limited extent under human control.

The future is not wholly ours nor wholly not ours, so that neither must we count upon it as quite certain to come, nor despair of it as quite certain not to come. . . . Destiny, which some introduce as sovereign over all things, [man] laughs to scorn, affirming rather that some things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency. For he sees that necessity destroys responsibility and that chance and fortune are inconstant; whereas our own actions are free. . . . Exercise thyself in these and kindred precepts day and night . . . then never, either in waking or in dream, wilt thou be disturbed.

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