

## DEMOCRITUS

### The Philosopher

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Democritus, the ancient Greek Philosopher, was born in about 460 B.C. in the city of Abdera, situated on the coast of Thrace. He was a man of vast learning. He wrote many books on Physics, Metaphysics, Ethics, Mathematics and History. He travelled extensively and gathered adequate knowledge and wisdom about other nations. He travelled to Egypt and probably to Babylon. He developed Atomism and apparently derived his views from Leucippus, about whom very little is known. Though Democritus was regarded as the philosopher who formulated the theory of Atomism, we should delve in to the various Pre-Socratic theories advocated by philosophers like Zeno, Empedocles, Anaxagoras etc. which inspired Leucippus and Democritus to formulate their specific theories on the reality of atoms. Though they were inspired by the former philosophers, yet Aristotle believed that the actual founder of Atomism was Leucippus, which was later developed and disciplined by Democritus and his followers.

Democritus was a disciple of Leucippus. As said earlier, very little is known about Leucippus and what little is known about him and his philosophical views, they were only through the writings of Democritus and his followers. According to Democritus, atoms are solid, infinite in number, each differing from one another solely in quantitative respects such as shape, size, etc. Atoms are internally unchanging, possessing perhaps the property of weight. Their motion is everlasting and uncaused.

Democritus and his school had explained the world by moving material atoms. The atoms of Democritus were simple and physically indivisible, for that in terms of which everything else is explained must be ultimate and incapable of being split into parts *ad infinitum*. He also insisted on the reality of empty space as a condition of the motion of atoms. Unlike Anaxagoras, who explained motion by reference to mind—which is a principle apart from the moving elements; for Democritus, motion is an intrinsic property of the atoms. Anaxagoras explains mind as a purposive or teleological principle, but the atoms of Democritus are subject to mechanical law.

Democritus accepted Parmenides' argument that there is no generation and destruction, but he did not accept the further argument that there is no motion. Motion is made possible by a void which is a kind of not-being, but not nothing at all..

Although Democritus uses human analogies to explain cosmic processes, he explains all natural events as the products of mechanical forces. The soul is a compound of atoms, in particular of fine spherical atoms. Even sense-perceptions are accounted by him through atomic motions.

Any immoderate experiences will cause imbalance in the soul and lead to misery. We should seek 'EUTHYMIA' (equanimity, cheerfulness) by cultivating contentment and desisting from envy and emulation. A person with equanimity of mind will live lawfully in the state. Thus Democritus was able to formulate a detailed, though conventional, an ethical theory from his physical principles.

Democritus died in about 370 B.C. He had no immediate successors, though his theory was revived later by Epicurus, who put it to use as the basis of his philosophy of consolation. □

**References:-**

1. Stace, W.T, *A Critical History Of Greek Philosophy*.
2. Thilly, Frank, *A History Of Philosophy*.
3. Copleston, F, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. I*.