

## Leucippus, father of atomism

Author: Josemari Sarasola

Gizapedia



- He is credited with founding the philosophy of atomism.
- We have very few sources about Leucippus' life and works in philosophy. We know he lived in the fifth century B.C.
- He was a pupil of Zeno of Elea, who was a pupil of Parmenides of Elea. Actually, atomism tried to clarify Zeno's paradoxes, claiming that space and things are not infinitely divisible, at the end we always find the atoms and indivisible.

- Although he didn't cite his contributions, Aristotle stated that Leucippus was the founder of atomism; surely after reading Megas Diakosmos (Big Cosmology), a work allegedly written by Leucippus. But later, in the third century B.C. Epicurus rejected that claim and stated that Leucippus had never existed.
- Nevertheless, Democritus, pupil or colleague of Leucippus, is regarded as the most important atomist. Allegedly, Democritus collected and developed Leucippus' most ideas and from him we have known the atomism as a philosophy.
- Leucippus gave the main ideas about atomism, and Democritus worked out and developed them to explain natural phenomena.

- Leucippus left us only one quotation, but not about atomism, in the work titled On Mind (Peri Nou):

*Nothing occurs at random,  
but everything for a reason  
and by necessity.*

οὐδέν χρήμα μάτην γίνεται,  
ἀλλὰ πάντα ἐκ λόγου τε  
καὶ ὑπ' ἀνάγκης

- And so, unfortunately, the philosophy system of Leucippus has reached our times through Aristotle's (4. century B.C.) and Teophrastus' (3. century B:c.) works and commentaries.

- Atomism is regarded as a school apart from other schools among presocratic philosophers. In fact, it was a philosophy system developed from the Eleatic School, whose most important philosopher is Parmenides, in order to make compatible the unchanging Parmenidean One with the apparent changing world of sensations, specially with the idea of change itself.
- Leucippus tried to reconcile the absolute existence of the Parmenidean One with the apparent movement of things. There is an infinity number of atoms, according to him, only different about size, shape and position. Movement and the world itself is created from a whirl of atoms, by means of interactions among those atoms. But the main attribute of atoms is the same for all of them. So we can state that atom is a concept derived from the Parmenidean One.

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