

We must recognise that when we know something we either do, or by reflecting, can know that our condition is one of knowing that thing, while when we believe something, we either do or can know that our condition is one of believing and not of knowing: so that we cannot mistake belief for knowledge or vice versa. (Prichard, 1950, 88)

There is little reason to think that the incorrectness of the view should have been more obvious to the Stoics than it was to Moore, Malcolm, or Prichard.³⁹

Epicurus, head of the the other dogmatic Hellenistic school, held an even more extreme view. He took all knowledge to derive from the senses (LS 16A) and famously claimed that “all sense-impressions are true” (LS 16F). He could do so by holding a narrow conception of their content: vision only directly tells us about colours and “shape at a distance”, for instance.⁴⁰ Plausibly, he took having a sense-impression to be discernible. But unlike Stoics, he did not think it possible to discern a special class of sense-impressions.⁴¹ So claiming that all are true would have been the only way to secure the existence of discernible marks of truth. Indeed, Epicurus seems to have embraced the claim as the sole alternative to scepticism.⁴² Epicurean epistemology fits the Classical Infallibilist schema as well.⁴³

The phrase *criterion of truth* was introduced by Epicurus and adopted by subsequent schools. Epicureans said sense-impressions were the criterion; Stoics said it was cognitive impressions; Sceptics denied there was one.⁴⁴ I suggest

³⁹A few mitigating circumstances for the Stoics are worth mentioning. First, they may have been implicitly working with some restricted notion of possibility—say, physical possibility. Second, they may have underestimated what is possible in that sense: as salient as they are to us, sceptical scenarios involving an Evil Demon or a world created five minutes ago were not brought up until much later. Note also that Stoics are fatalists, so sceptical scenarios are possible only if actual. Third, they arguably did not think that the discernibility of cognitive impressions was a matter of a simple introspective check, but rather a matter of being sensitive to their distinctive features, which would require some training (Frede, 1999, 315).

⁴⁰Long and Sedley (1987, 84). Compare Aristotle’s *De Anima* 428b18–24.

⁴¹LS 16B: “neither can sense refute sense, because of their equal validity”.

⁴²“What is Epicurus’s principle? If any sense-perception is false, it is not possible to perceive [have cognition of] anything.” (Cicero, *Lucullus*, 32.101, trans. Everson, 1990, 161)

⁴³Unlike Cyrenaics who held that we only know about our impressions, Epicurus allowed knowledge of things beyond the immediate objects of the senses. Like Aristotle before him and the Stoics after him, his account involved the formation of “preconceptions” in the mind after repeated exposure to impressions of things. Though I cannot examine them in detail here, my contention is that these doctrines were at the very least compatible with Classical Infallibilism. See Frede (1999, 318–20) for a favourable discussion. By contrast, Everson (1990, 180) ascribes to Epicurus a fallibilist view on which inferences from sense-impressions to further facts deliver knowledge despite being “vulnerable to error”. There is no direct textual support for this view; Everson infers it from (1) the fact that Epicurus was not an external world sceptic and (2) the fact that Epicurus does not seem to have a reply to the sceptical objection that our inferences from sense-impressions are not truth-preserving. While the objection is recorded (Striker, 1977, 141), the alleged fallibilist response does not fit well with Epicurus’s strict requirement on a “criterion of truth” to “exclude falsehood” (LS 40B, see Long and Sedley, 1987, 88).

⁴⁴LS 40A. Chrysippus sometimes added “preconception”; but it is plausible preconceptions are