

# New Sedley Chapter On Ancient Greek Atheism

Post by "Cassius" of March 23, 2022 at 10:52 AM

## [Quote from Matt](#)

I do hold that sincerity of belief is important to trusting the rest of a person's character. If perhaps Epicurus was acting in a manner that fit the description held by his opponents, that he was merely hiding a form of atheism while constructing a false theology that allowed for him to remain in good standing with the pious Greeks, then that would cause the rest of his system to be called into question in my opinion. That would be a very troubling situation. But I don't believe he did that.

Yes that's my view almost exactly. Other philosophers were known to be atheist, and I have a very hard time believing that Epicurus could not himself have found a living situation somewhere - outside of Athens if necessary - where he could teach his views with complete honesty. That means that if he chose to stay in Athens for simple convenience or for the "good life" that it offered, at the expense of being honest with his students, he would be open to charges of the worst kind of hypocrisy. He wasn't hemmed in by some of the scientific views that we think hem us in today.

It appears to me that Epicurus thought that there was nothing at all contradictory to science about gods being made of a form of atoms that they could replenish, any more than that anything contradicted the view that life exists at other places throughout the universe. We don't have to accept the same viewpoint today if we think that there's some scientific fact that contradicts it, but there's no reason to impute modern concerns about the limits of life in the rest of the universe back in time to Epicurus.

A lot of this comes down to the issue of "philosophy" vs "science" and their relative roles, as we've discussed before here on the forum and if I recall maybe even in this thread. I don't think it's necessary to take sides, and I think they both can be reconciled, but I think what Epicurus was warning against in his day, and it still applies today, that it is very tempting for some people to take "science" and make speculative claims that can't be reconciled with sound "philosophy," and whenever that happens a lot of warning bells ought to go off in our minds.