

Comparing the Proof Requirements Of James Randi To Those of Epicurus

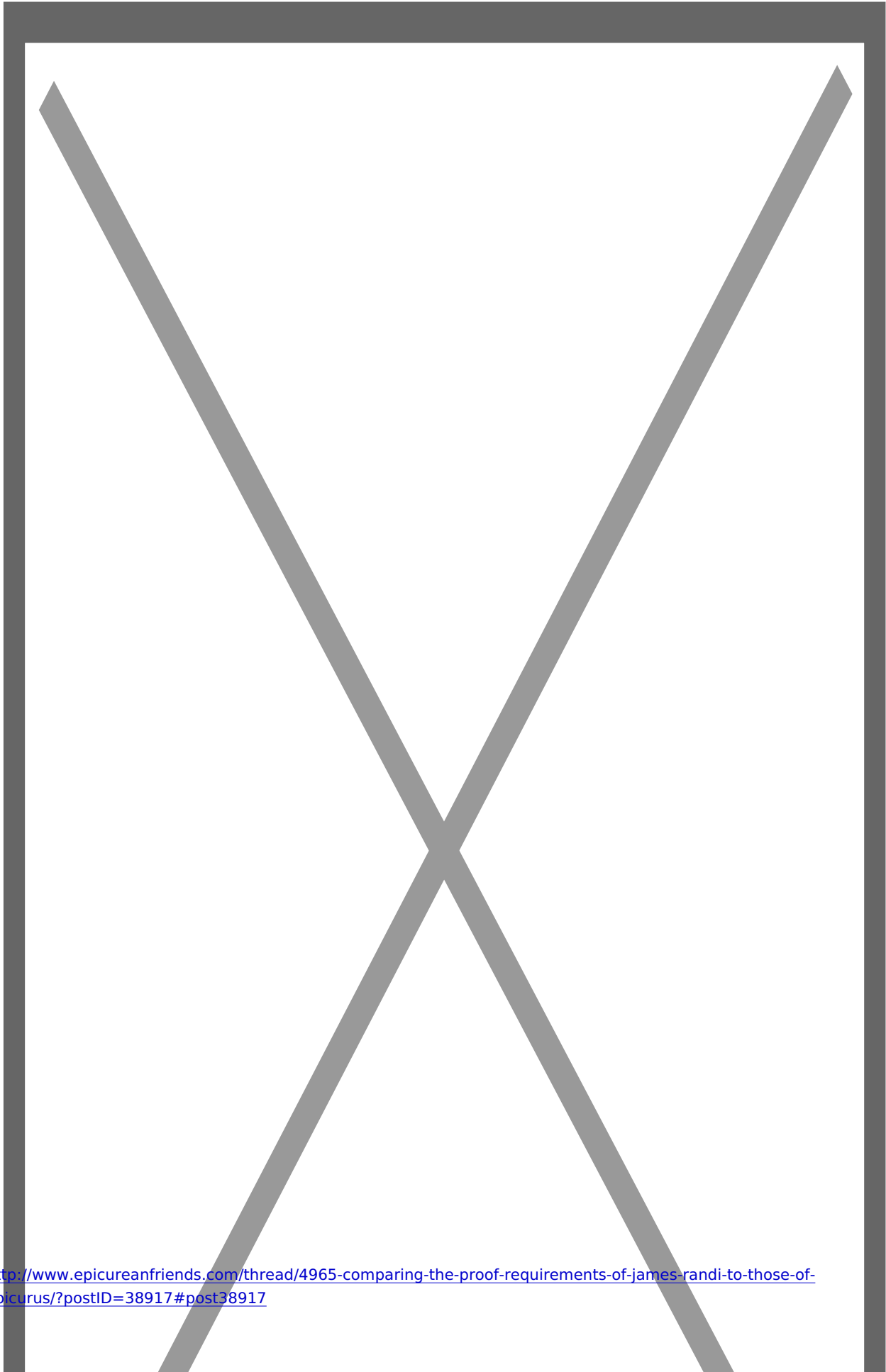
Post by "Cassius" of March 6, 2026 at 9:16 AM

James Randi was a famous skeptic of paranormal claims. In posting this I don't know how close his views were to those of Epicurus, but it would probably advance our canonics discussion to discuss the similarities and differences in approach.

Some of Randi's work is consistent with aspects of Lucian's comments on Epicurus in "Alexander the Oracle-Monger." On the other hand it sounds like Randi was more of a pure skeptic than was Epicurus.

If we have any people who have read about Randi in the past it might be interesting to compare his life and his approach to paranormal claims to those of Epicurus. At the very least it would probably be interesting to evaluate his challenges to paranormal claims as a method of evaluating what kinds of standards of proof are and are not appropriate to demand.

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<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4965-comparing-the-proof-requirements-of-james-randi-to-those-of-epicurus/?postID=38917#post38917>

[James Randi - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

I see that Randi's views on the existence of a supernatural god are more "agnostic" than that of Epicurus, so there's already a bright line of division there. However there are probably many other aspects of Randi's public life and interfacing with religious claims that would be worth discussing over time.

Views on religion

Randi's parents were members of the [Anglican Church](#) but rarely attended services.^[137] He attended [Sunday school](#) at St. Cuthbert's Church in [Toronto](#) a few times as a child, but he independently decided to stop going after receiving no answer to his request for proof of the teachings of the Church.^{[22]: 24:40 [c][138]}

In his essay "Why I Deny Religion, How Silly and Fantastic It Is, and Why I'm a Dedicated and Vociferous [Bright](#)", Randi, who identified himself as an [atheist](#),^[139] opined that many accounts in religious texts, including the [virgin birth](#), the miracles of Jesus Christ, and the [parting of the Red Sea](#) by [Moses](#), are not believable. Randi refers to the [Virgin Mary](#) as being "impregnated by a ghost of some sort, and as a result produced a son who could walk on water, raise the dead, turn water into wine, and multiply loaves of bread and fishes" and questions how [Adam and Eve](#)'s family "managed to populate the Earth without committing incest". He wrote that, compared to the Bible, "[The Wizard of Oz](#) is more believable. And much more fun."^[140]

Clarifying his view of atheism, Randi wrote "I've said it before: there are two sorts of atheists. One sort claims that there is no deity, the other claims that there is no evidence that proves the existence of a deity; I belong to the latter group, because if I were to claim that no god exists, I would have to produce evidence to establish that claim, and I cannot. Religious persons have by far the easier position; they say they believe in a deity because that's their preference, and they've read it in a book. That's their right."^[139]

In *An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural* (1995), he examines various spiritual practices skeptically. Of the meditation techniques of [Guru Maharaj Ji](#), he writes "Only the very naive were convinced that they had been let in on some sort of celestial secret."^[141] In 2003, he was one of the signers of the [Humanist Manifesto](#).^[142]

Regarding his 2006 coronary artery bypass surgery, Randi was asked if he was tempted by religious ideas about an afterlife or if he went through it any differently than if he had been religious. Randi replied "I allowed [Daniel Dennett](#) to speak for me" referring to Dennett's essay "Thank Goodness", which Dennett wrote after a serious surgery. Summing up the essay, Randi continued:^[143]

Quote

(...) when he was recovering in the hospital he had people coming in and saying "Oh, thank God, you're doing this, that and the other", and he wrote this little essay, he said "No, never mind 'thank god' but I'll accept thank goodness. Thank the goodness of the anaesthesiologist. Thank the goodness of the nurses who empty my bedpan. Thank the goodness of the intern who sweeps the floor regularly so that I don't have to breathe too much dust. Thank the designers and makers of Dacron."

All of these things, he said, "Yes, thank their goodness but don't thank a mythical being."

And, essentially that's a contraction of it, rather severely, but that's the way I feel, yes.

In a discussion with [Kendrick Frazier](#) at [CSIcon](#) 2016, Randi stated "I think that a belief in a deity is ... an unprovable claim ... and a rather ridiculous claim. It is an easy way out to explain things to which we have no answer."^{[22]: 7:05} He then summarized his current concern with religious belief as follows: "A belief in a god is one of the most damaging things that infests humanity at this particular moment in history. It may improve, and I see signs that it may be improving, and I'll leave it at that."^{[22]: 7:40}