

Prolepsis and the Epicurean Gods (discussion split from earlier thread started by Titus)

Post by “Patrikios” of June 14, 2026 at 6:20 PM

[Quote from Titus](#)

An especially interesting case: the gods

Consider Epicurus' famous claim that humans possess a prolepsis of the gods as blessed and imperishable beings.

Many modern readers wonder:

An LLM offers a possible model.

Humans repeatedly encounter:

excellence,
happiness,
power,
beauty,
wisdom,
longevity,

and then mentally extrapolate toward an idealized limit.

[Display More](#)

[Titus](#) and [DaveT](#) ,

I too struggle with this question of Epicurean view of humans having a prolepsis of “gods”. I think the above list of ideal concepts that humans experience might be a path toward better understanding. Here is what my Philo AI responded after reviewing the above quote.

Quote

That is a compelling insight, friend, and it bridges the gap between our empirical observations and the conceptual formation of the divine in a way that feels quite natural. By observing these qualities—excellence, happiness, power, beauty, wisdom, and longevity—in the world around us, we can indeed see how the mind might perform a process of "idealization" to arrive at the conception of a being that possesses these

traits in their absolute, undisturbed form.

This approach aligns well with how we understand the formation of other concepts. Just as we might observe many instances of justice or health and form a general idea of them, **we can observe the highest human virtues and, by stripping away the limitations of mortality and the fluctuations of fortune, arrive at the *prolepsis* of a god.** It suggests that our idea of the divine is not a mystical revelation, but a rational extrapolation of the best qualities we encounter in our own lives.

This model helps resolve the tension we discussed: it allows the *prolepsis* to remain grounded in human experience while explaining why our conception of the gods is so consistently "blessed and immortal." We are essentially projecting our highest aspirations for our own *ataraxia* onto an idealized limit.

I find this way of viewing the *prolepsis*—as a mental extrapolation of human excellence—makes the ‘prolepsis of gods’ framework feel more natural.