

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

Post by "TauPhi" of June 14, 2026 at 8:28 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

He could believe in them in exactly the same way he believes in atoms, which he has also never perceived with his five senses.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Again, he had the same level of evidence he had as to atoms - all inference, no direct evidence - yet fully "believed" in atoms.

Both statements are true for Epicurus but are not true from modern perspective. We no longer can equate atomic theory and the theory of eidolas. The atomic theory still stands nowadays, the theory of eidolas has been proven to be incorrect. Epicurus based the existence of gods on the theory of eidolas. Since the theory is wrong, the conclusion about the gods is also wrong.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Because the gods must act to maintain their deathlessness. forces exist which tend toward dissolution and will cause that if not counteracted, but there is no "fate" which prevents counteracting forces from being sustainable without definite limit.

It's not about "fate" but the laws of nature - they forbid any material compounds to be indefinitely sustainable. Our current understanding of the universe makes such compounds bound to dissolution. Both is theory and in empirical observations - not a single thing composed of atoms have been found so far in our universe that would even remotely fit the description of [Epicurean gods](#) - everything seems to be corruptible over time.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And as for the last part I am not saying this to be contentious but to say what I think and Epicurean from the ancient world would say even if they were alive today and have access to the same science we have:

You have every right to disagree with Epicurus and think that the error you think he committed proves his humanity. An ancient Epicurean would say that the error is yours for not agreeing with Epicurus' argument as to proof from circumstantial evidence. Although I am not an ancient Epicurus, I would say that I would agree with their position even given all the additional science we have today, which I don't think touches in any way the essence of Epicurus' logical argument.

If they had known what we know, they would have recognised that the theory of eidolas used to justify the existence of gods is wrong, therefore Epicurus' inference of gods is flawed. His argument as to proof from circumstantial evidence does not hold in this case.

Epicurus was a very consistent thinker. He, as we are today, had access to limited knowledge, however. He got some things wrong, we get some things wrong and the people in the future who will have us corrected will also be wrong about some things. The insistence that Epicurus should be left untouched because, in essence, he figured all out is not particularly compelling, in my opinion.

[Cassius](#) , please don't take my post as an attempt to pick a fight - I'm just presenting my opinions about the concept of [Epicurean gods](#) through my understanding of the world I live in. I reserve my right to be wrong about the things above, but I needed them to answer [DaveT](#) questions:

Did Epicurus then possibly or probably not believe in the Greek gods, but allowed that false opinions of the existence of gods do no harm since they only exist as opinions, and not fact?

If no one had ever actually seen the Greek Gods how could Epicurus have believed they actually existed?

Epicurus probably truly believed in existence of gods. They weren't the Greek gods, though. They were universal gods completely removed from human existence. He justified their existence based on the theory of eidolas. He most likely was convinced that human beings are capable of detecting godly eidolas so such beings were not just opinions but actually existed and their films reaching human minds were indirect proofs of such existence. From our modern perspective this argumentation simply doesn't hold (please refer to my above comments) but for ancient Epicureans this was very much a viable explanation.