

The Possibility of The "Images" Theory Being Not So Absurd After All

Post by "Cassius" of July 8, 2024 at 1:15 PM

I will probably re-title this and perhaps move it to physics, but we need at least one thread to discuss possible physical mechanism by which Epicurus' theory of images is treated as possibly containing at least a grain of truth and possibly much more.

I may also rewrite this first post over time, because I was rushing when I first posted it. Primary issues to discuss would include:

(1) Analogies for how the brain might be affected by external sources not coming through the eyes or the five senses, which I think would include research on how the brain can be impacted by radiation (including cell phones, and similar issues discussed here: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3425/14/4/308>)

(2) Analogous physical principles now known to us by which a received (even with no power) can react to external stimulus, such as passive RFID devices: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chipless_RFID

(3) Exploring just what is reliably asserted about prolepsis / images and what is not, such as our recent discussions that prolepsis would not be the receipt of fully-formed ideas, but something less than that. We know for example that Cicero was joking/picking at Cassius alleging that Epicureans might say that he (Cicero) was thinking of Cassius because of an image of Cassius floating through the air, but that might be a reduction ad absurdem and might well go significantly beyond what Epicurus actually asserted. Presumably Epicurus did not think that fully-formed "conceptual pictures" (like the conceptual picture of Cicero) floated through the air to be interpreted by the mind directly as an image of Cicero, but something less than that, just like the eyes transmit something that in our MINDS we conclude indicates Cicero, not because the eyes "tell" us it is Cicero.

Post by "TauPhi" of July 8, 2024 at 8:24 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I will probably re-title this and perhaps move it to physics, but we need at least one thread to discuss possible physical mechanism by which Epicurus' theory of images is treated as possibly containing at least a grain of truth and possibly much more.

Epicurean (well, technically Democritean) physical mechanism of images is wrong at the core. Two millennia back nobody could possibly come up with the concept of electromagnetic radiation, photons reflecting off of objects and optical mechanism of eyes. The objects constantly emitting eidolas which move through the air and which are directly interacting with us is a theory all right, but saying 'it has a grain of truth and possibly much more' is like saying that when a caveman blew the dust off a rock he discovered how a pneumatic press work. There is a grain there in the form of air pressure but linking it to a pneumatic press several thousand years later is stretching a point a tiny bit.

I would even argue that Epicureans should have figured out by themselves that the theory of images was flawed. If I can come up with below scenarios, I'm sure much brighter minds of the past should have thought about it as well.

If every object constantly emits eidolas, what about objects that are made up with 2 atoms only? Two atoms combined already make an object and according to the theory, that object should start emitting constant flow of eidolas. But if it does, one of two things happen (probably more, but I don't want to think about it for too long):

- 1) the object disappears instantly
- 2) the object is instantly replenished by exactly the same 2 atoms (which would require conscious assembly abilities of atoms and atomic theory would be proven wrong)

Another problem is eidolas pushing though the air. If everything emits eidolas in every direction all the time, it's impossible to use air as medium of transportation due to infinite conflicts of direction resulting in some sort of 'eidola tornadoes'.

I guess Ancient Greeks were perfectly capable of raising such concerns and if there are Epicurean solutions to the above concerns, feel free to point them out as I'm not aware of them.

My point is, let's appreciate ingenuity of Greek philosophers who were capable of extraordinary though experiments without access to almost any scientific knowledge, but let's not try to paint them as pneumatic press operation experts.

Post by “Cassius” of July 8, 2024 at 9:21 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

If every object constantly emits eidolas, what about objects that are made up with 2 atoms only? Two atoms combined already make an object and according to the theory, that object should start emitting constant flow of eidolas.

I see that as an example of something we see a lot in modern Epicurean writing - a construction of an Epicurean theory that makes no effort to view the theory in a workable way. If you and I can realize that a two-atom body would not be radiating atoms, then Epicurus would certainly have understood that too. I see no improper deference or leap of faith at all in concluding that everyone - including Epicurus - should realize that two-atom bodies (if they deserve the term bodies at all - are not going to be radiating off particles that they don't have. We don't know a lot about what Epicurus thought about images, but one thing we do know is that images are natural and therefore made of atoms just like everything else.

I don't have the specialized background to be able to take positions on particle physics and develop understandable analogies, but the basic point of the atomic theory, of which images are only a part, is that things happen through the movement of particles through void, and not "supernaturally" without that movement. And while I am perfectly happy to talk about waves and quarks and all sorts of other imaginative names, I am not going to defer to any theorists or theories which ultimately do not take into account that "natural vs supernatural" position. Call them waves or quarks or whatever, they are "material" from any reasonable viewpoint, and that makes them consistent with Epicurus' position.

That's the base of image theory, not a hostile construction like Cicero was suggesting, which would make no sense, under the Epicurean viewpoint. As noted in my first post, the theory would *not* be that Kodak-quality images are flying through the air that we need no optical lenses or other means to perceive. The more charitable view is probably not much more than that particles from outside, retaining some degree of "arrangement" that does not require lenses focusing onto optical nerves or ears leading to eardrums, produce stimulus and reaction in the particles making up the human body. There seem to me to be very logical ways that such a construction can be analogized to modern observations in ways that are productive and not any more ridiculous on their face than the atomic theory itself appeared to the anti-Epicureans 2000 years ago.

I realize that not everyone is going to want to pursue this line of thinking, just like everyone is not going to want to entertain discussion of "god." But the purpose of this forum is to provide a place for those who *do* wish to explore such possibilities in a reasonable manner.

As we proceed in this and other topics like the nature of the gods, our goal will be to allow negative commentary without discouraging or stifling those who want to make positive contributions. I know that Tau Phi speaks for a significant group here, but because I have interacted so much with him personally I also feel sure he would not want his post to be interpreted as stifling free discussion of the topic.

We will moderate the thread as we do the forum, encouraging constructive discussion of epicurean theories even where they seem outdated, Unfortunately, others will read this who have no way of knowing that Tau Phi would not want productive conversation to be stifled. Therefore to be clear, everyone who reads this thread in the future should know that we will treat this topic, as we do all Epicurean positions, respectfully and reasonably. We will encourage constructive discussion of all well-documented Epicurean theories even if conventional wisdom tells us that modern orthodoxy would frown at the idea of taking Epicurus seriously.

Post by “TauPhi” of July 8, 2024 at 9:58 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I know that Tau Phi speaks for a significant group here, but because I have interacted so much with him personally I also feel sure he would not want his post to be interpreted as stifling free discussion of the topic.

I only speak for myself and you're absolutely right [Cassius](#) - I'm not trying to stifle the discussion. Quite contrary - I clearly present my point on trying to translate 2.5 thousand old physical theory into modern times but it's only my point of view. Nothing more. I don't reserve the right to be correct and I wholeheartedly encourage others to join the discussion and present their ideas. There are a lot of insightful minds in the forum and I believe some interesting points could be raised here.

Post by “Don” of July 8, 2024 at 11:35 PM

I'm going jump into this fray by saying I lean toward [TauPhi](#) 's position on this thread's topic. First, I will state that there are - let's call them - "similarities" between Epicurean/Democritean physics and their mechanism of sensation via eidola and modern physics and modern neuroscience. Those similarities are what attracted me to investigate Epicurean philosophy in the first place.

However...

Those similarities do *not* translate - for me - into Epicurus or Democritus being prescient about particle physics or electromagnetic energy/waves or RFID or radio/television transmission. And, for me, their paradigms don't have to be prescient to still be impressive. For the times they lived in, they were revolutionary! For the times they lived in, they figured out a lot from mere thought-experiments and working through problems in their heads. For me, their huge contributions toward a more scientific world-view included:

1. The world is physical without the need for gods to step in to create or to fine-tune.
2. Everything in the cosmos is composed of innumerable arrangements of tiny "uncuttable" (a-tomos) particles which we can't see.
 1. In fact, we could never see (Thanks to [TauPhi](#) for bringing up the 2-atom idea. Even more so, an "atom" couldn't give off eidola).
3. Our eyes do not give off beams like a lantern that perceive things in our environment. Our eyes - and other senses - are impacted by stimuli (eidola) streaming from material things.
 1. Superficially, light bouncing off something and then interacting with our eyes could seem like "That's just like eidola" but not if we honestly assess the paradigm Epicurus was working under as in "The bodies themselves give off films."

And so on...

Some of those things have superficial analogies in our modern understanding (like the light example above), but once the details are worked out and the underlying paradigms are applied, I don't believe the idea that "They were onto something" holds up. It seems more like cases of parallel or convergent evolution of ideas; however, I will fully agree that later "natural philosophers" and scientists built on Epicurus (sounds mostly like via Lucretius) ideas of atoms and the rest.

I respect Epicurus's ingenuity and deeply respect the direction he set scientific thought. However, I don't think we need to shoehorn his φυσικός (physikos) into modern physics to appreciate that ingenuity.

All that said, I am more than open to additional ideas on this or citations and references to texts that provide additional details to consider! That's one thing I deeply appreciate about this forum is the free and open exchange of ideas on Epicurean philosophy. What's the saying "Iron sharpens iron"? (Oh, no! [That turns out to be Biblical](#) although it appears from that link that Horace and Euripides had similar sayings)!

Post by "Cassius" of July 9, 2024 at 7:41 AM

I have an idea for a new thread, the content of which I won't post here, so as to derail this one, but which deserves discussion of its own.

Ok we can follow up on this topic in a different location so as to leave this current thread open for the images discussion:

Thread

["If You Wish To Be An Epicurean, Get Used To Being Called 'Cockeyed'" - or - "Why Vatican Saying 29 Would Make A Good Epicurean Tatoo"](#)

I want to get this down before I forget the list - at the moment I forget where the "cockeyed" reference comes in, but we can circle back for that. This only took me about ten minutes to put together. I am sure there are many more.

Every one one of these major positions of Epicurus can easily be ridiculed. Nevertheless, most of us who study Epicurus come to the conclusion that when we look close they actually contain much more than a "grain" of truth, from at least one very important...



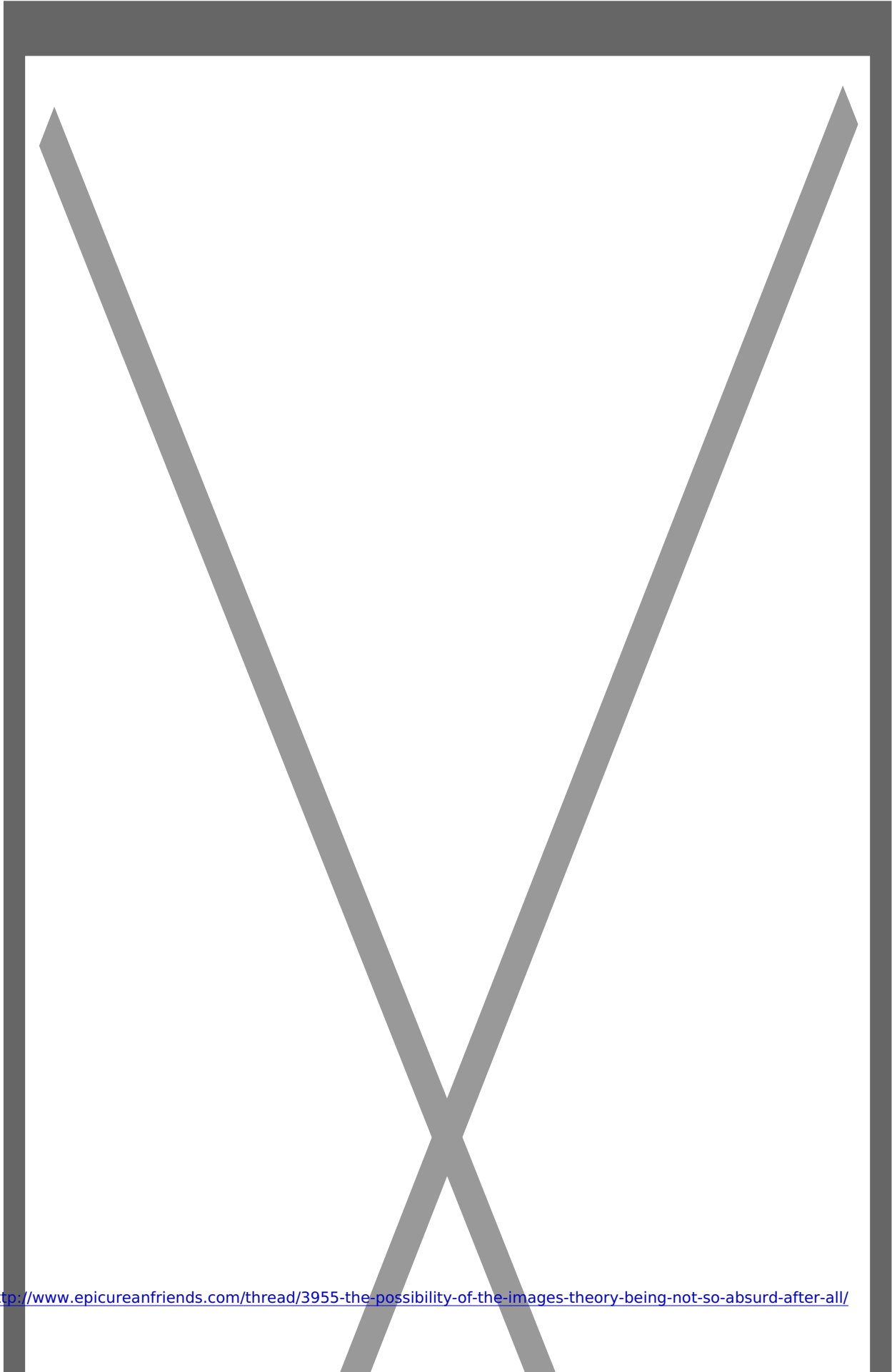
Cassius

July 9, 2024 at 7:57 AM

Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2024 at 9:29 AM

Another link that I will file away to consider as to how exposure to repetitive images over time would impact us:

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[Afterimage - Wikipedia](#)
en.wikipedia.org